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Chaucer's Pardoner and Wife of Bath

Alastair Minnis



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Chaucer's Pardoner and Wife of Bath

ALASTAIR MINNIS

PENE

UNIVERSITY OF PENNSYLVANIA PRESS
PHILADELPHIA

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Published by

University of Pennsylvania Press

Philadelphia, Pennsylvania 19104-4112

Printed in the United States of America on acid-free paper

10 9 8 7 6 5 4 3 2 1

Library of Congress Cataloging-in-Publication Data

Minnis, A. J. (Alastair J.)

Fallible authors : Chaucer's Pardoner and Wife of Bath /
Alastair Minnis.

p. cm. — (Middle ages series)

Includes bibliographical references and index.

ISBN-13: 978-0-8122-4030-6 (alk. paper)

ISBN-10: 0-8122-4030-8 (alk. paper)

1. Chaucer, Geoffrey, d. 1400. Pardoner's tale.

2. Chaucer, Geoffrey, d. 1400. Wife of Bath's tale. I. Title.

PR1868.p3 M56 2007

821 '.1 22

2007017366

To
SARAH
and
KATHERINE

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Preface

One read black where the other read white, his hope
The other man's damnation:
Up the Rebels, To Hell with the Pope,
And God Save—as you prefer—the King or Ireland. . . .
And each one in his will
Binds his heirs to continuance of hatred. . .

—LOUIS MACNEICE, *Autumn Journal*, XVI

I grew up in Northern Ireland, a land where the scars of the Reformation were still prominently on display. Born on the Protestant “Scots Irish” side of the religious divide, I knew hardly any Catholics, and certainly had no Catholic friends, until in 1966 I became a student at what was, at that time, the only integrated educational institution in the province, the Queen’s University of Belfast. There my fascination with medieval Catholic thought began—fostered by the unique Department of Scholastic Philosophy (which taught Thomism rather than the fashionable existentialism on offer in the Department of Philosophy just up the street). I must be one of the few people on the planet for whom reading Aquinas and Ockham was an act of youthful rebellion.

My own family, thankfully, was full of people who had little fear of the unconventional. Part of their take on their Protestant dissenting tradition was the conviction that one had to make one’s own life, through faith and works. My grandfather was a striking case in point—and a forceful, though hardly straightforward, influence. Following a disillusioning involvement with the private army which Sir Edward Carson illegally recruited to resist Irish Home Rule in 1914, he settled into an existence wherein pugnacious piety easily coexisted with contempt for many actual clergymen of our acquaintance, together with admiration for the life and works of Joe Stalin, “man of steel” (whose atrocities in the name of social revolution were as yet unknown). Another of his heroes was local author Alexander Irvine (1863–1941), now commemorated with a drab little square in the town of Antrim, where the hovel in which he lived as a child is preserved as a tourist attraction—somewhat implausibly, given that Irvine’s gospel of Christian trade-unionism (the care of fellow-workers in this world and in preparation for the next) is hardly popular nowadays. Originally an uneducated working man like my grandfather, Irvine worked as a newsboy, miner, boxer, and soldier before emigrating to the United States, where he studied theology at Yale University, became a friend of Jack London’s, and served as both

missionary and union organizer among the poor in New York's Bowery. Here was socialist nonconformity at its most complex—and its best.

Irvine further embodies the complexities of Northern Ireland inasmuch as he was the product of a mixed marriage between an illiterate Protestant shoemaker and a clever Catholic farm girl. In *My Lady of the Chimney Corner* (1913) Anna Irvine is presented as a madonna of the hearth who gains wisdom through the suffering brought about by abject poverty. Her simple but sage pronouncements would not look out of place in *Piers Plowman*.

The present book may be seen as the outcome of an intellectual mixed marriage, what happens when a product of a Protestant dissenting tradition (which proudly traces its origins back to Lollardy) enters into a relationship with the Other of Catholic orthodoxy in its late-medieval manifestation. In particular, it goes back to my original wonderment at the Catholic location of authority in institutional hierarchy rather than individual state of grace, the power and prestige of the office being supposed to transcend the fallibilities of the human being who holds it. Hence, for example, an immoral priest can (in certain circumstances at least) preach and administer the sacraments without detriment to his congregation, his sin being a private matter between him and God. To which the Protestant response would be that immorality deprives the clergyman of his right to officiate in any such way.

A more recent impetus was provided by the extraordinary events in the United States during late 1998 and early 1999, which saw the publication of the *Starr Report* on President Clinton's dubious conduct and the subsequent impeachment proceedings against him. Here the relationships between the authoritative office and the fallible officeholder, between the public man and what he tried to withhold as his private life, were raised and debated as never before. Clinton himself deployed the discourse of "public and private" in his television broadcast to the nation on 17 August 1998. Some of the questions put to him by the Office of Independent Counsel and the Grand Jury had, he said, concerned his "private life," and hence these were "questions no American citizen would ever want to answer." Having conceded that he "must take complete responsibility for all [his] actions, both public and private," Clinton went on to emphasize the hurt he had caused "the two people I love most," his wife and daughter. "I intend to reclaim my family life for my family. It's nobody's business but ours. Even presidents have private lives."¹ Gabriel García Márquez wrote a powerful defense of this position, declaring that "At the end of the day, his personal drama is a private matter between him and his wife. . . . It is one thing to lie to deceive, it is something quite different

to protect one's private life."²

To judge by the opinion polls, a majority of Americans thought so too. And yet, the next president they (marginally) elected, George W. Bush, could hardly be more different in self-image. In Bush country, the private *is* the political and vice-versa; the same faith that sustains the president's soul is offered to voters as ensuring their nation's salvation (in moral, monetary and military terms). During the 2004 presidential election those who took up that offer professed themselves drawn to Bush by his "morals and his character"; the interrelated values of "faith, family, integrity and trust" which the Bush campaign consistently projected proved unbeatable.³

As I write, Bush is halfway through his second term and the jury is, so to speak, still out on the success or failure of his presidency. However, at the beginning of a book which will spend so much time with Chaucer's *Pardoner's Tale*, it seems appropriate to recall how Senator Robert Byrd used this very text as he urged the U.S. Senate to handle the Clinton impeachment investigation in a reasonable and consensual manner. He reminded his colleagues of how, in that tale, three men find a pot of gold only to kill one another to get it all.⁴ Leaving aside the obvious quibble over whether a "pot of gold" was an appropriate metaphor to apply to Starr's findings, one might suggest that the senators could have noted another major aspect of Chaucer's text: its claim that an immoral man can tell a moral tale. Or, as in the case of the morally flawed but highly professional Bill Clinton, preside over a successful economy and pursue policies at home and abroad which history may appraise with respect and sympathy, particularly when viewed in relation to those of a successor whose supposedly sound "morals and character" were made the basis of his fitness to lead. To quote a bumper sticker I see frequently in New Haven, "nobody died when Clinton lied."

Continuing this move from presidents to poets, the truism inevitably follows that many of the most creative of people have sometimes acted in the worst of ways. The list is a long one, and multiplication of cases would be tedious: suffice it to mention the appeal which Nazism held for many artists and intellectuals of the mid-twentieth century, most obviously Ezra Pound; the anti-Semitism and/or racism of T. S. Eliot, George Orwell, and Graham Greene; and the appalling ways in which the likes of Thomas Hardy, Bertrand Russell, Pablo Picasso, and Philip Larkin treated their womenfolk. Then there are the allegations of rape brought against Arthur Koestler—and indeed, Geoffrey Chaucer. In the later Middle Ages, the problem presented itself in a particularly acute way, given that the *auctor* was held to be not only a writer but also an "authority" in the sense of a person whose words were judged worthy of imitation and belief. An

“immoral author” was therefore an oxymoron. Yet, in that period, many churchmen—and indeed many of their secular counterparts—displayed a disturbing number of shortcomings. Did such fallibilities devalue their authority, compromise their power, render their sacraments worthless, set their preaching at naught?

There was a name for the belief that the effectiveness of the sacraments depends on the moral character, the state of grace, of the minister: Donatism, after the controversial fourth-century bishop of Carthage, Donatus. The initiating cause seems to have been Bishop Felix of Aptunga’s collusion with the Emperor Diocletian’s persecution of Christians. This raised the question of whether the sacraments of one who had sinned so greatly against his fellows could possibly be valid, including his consecration of Donatus’s predecessor, Bishop Caecelian. Donatus won many adherents for the view that Caecelian’s consecration was invalid, and a schism developed in the church, the matter not being resolved until the Council of Carthage of 411, when Donatism was definitively hereticated. Approximately a thousand years later Chaucer’s contemporary John Wyclif fell into a version of that heresy—or, at least, was accused of having done so. (The nature and extent of Wyclif’s “Donatism” is a matter of some scholarly controversy, as my subsequent discussion will acknowledge.) His contemporary Geoffrey Chaucer created a character who declared that an immoral man can tell an effectively moral tale—a position that, *inter alia*, may be seen as a reflex of an orthodox reaction against Donatism. Or perhaps against that staple of Wycliffite thought, the conviction that power of any kind, whether spiritual or secular, depends on divine grace. Put simply, no pope, bishop, priest, or prince has true dominion (*dominium*) over his subjects while he lives in a state of mortal sin. It could be inferred that any spiritual authority which the Pardoner claims (whether rightly or wrongly, according to canon law) is devalued by his self-confessed viciousness. Herein lies the text’s major challenge.

Chaucer created another character, the Wife of Bath, who presents what was, by the standards of his day, an even greater challenge. A woman who displays in sensational form so many of the fallibilities then deemed endemic to her sex, dares to quote the Bible, bandy about authoritative documents just like a schoolman, enthusiastically defend female sexual desire, and tell a moral tale which suggests that true nobility comes from God alone and is unaffected by class or gender. And all this in an age in which Wycliffite nonconformity was developing the proposition that virtuous women had more right to preach than vicious men, and (in certain situations) could administer the sacraments—even that most controversial and contested sacrament of all, the Eucharist. Chaucer lived in interesting times.

This, inevitably, raises the issue of the poet's attitude to Wycliffite thought. I certainly believe (I could not have written this book otherwise) that Chaucer was fascinated by ideas which, during his lifetime, became more and more dangerous to discuss, and which (in certain distinctive and extreme forms) were deemed heretical.⁵ But that, of course, does not make him a Wycliffite sympathizer, and the elusive figure who flits behind his works seems an unlikely victim of the repressive forces unleashed by Henry IV and Archbishop Arundel in their attempt to crush Lollardy.⁶ I fully support the claim of Alan J. Fletcher, who has done more than anyone else to theorize the question of Chaucer's relationship with Wycliffism, that the poet "enlisted . . . 'the culture of heresy' in his writing."⁷ But sometimes we disagree on the details of how this was done and the significance of that enlistment. My main general reservation concerns Fletcher's adoption of the compound "radical/heretical discourse," which, he explains, "attempts to contain the complex and shifting status of reformist ideology c. 1380–1420, a period during which many positions within that ideology, though originally orthodox, increasingly lost their orthodox respectability as they became characteristically colonized by the heretics."⁸ That is well said, but we need not suppose that *any* apparently "radical" discourse inevitably became appropriated by heresy (and therefore, *tout court*, must be seen as heretical). The Lollards never gained a monopoly on (for example) criticism of deviant clergymen (especially with regard to preaching, pardons, and relics), unconventional deployment of *auctoritees*, outlandish treatment of marriage lore, or subversion of traditional gender-roles (not that Wyclif's own theology gave any real encouragement to *that*, as I shall explain below). The fact that Chaucer was interested in such issues need not mean that he advocated them in some distinctively Lollard form, and the ways in which the poet chose to manipulate certain sensitive ideas is far removed from the uses to which they were put by Wyclif's followers. (Besides, Chaucer merely glances at, or chooses to ignore, many of the matters that Lollards held most dear.)⁹ I would argue, furthermore, that the poet can be radical in ways which are *either* (broadly speaking) supportive of orthodoxy *or* according to its lights scandalous and maybe even subversive, without in any way entering the ideological empire of the heretics (whether their heartland or their colonized territories). The terms "radical" and "heretical," as brought together in Alan Fletcher's compound, are not inseparable companions.

Therefore I find highly appealing the model for reading dissent recently offered by Rita Copeland, which builds on Michel de Certeau's recuperation of those materials ("resistances," "survivals," "delays," etc.) that are held to be "irrelevant" to normative

“understanding of the past,” or indeed threatening to the uniformity that such understanding imposes.¹⁰ Copeland emphasizes the possibility of “ideological difference and dissent within the ‘official’ domains of academic or clerical discourses *as well as* [emphasis mine] the more commonly recognized conflicts between the ‘official’ and the ‘heterodox.’” I too wish to resist the temptation to collapse the former into the latter, being eager to see restored “to the notion of dissent its dynamism and elasticity as a gesture of difference.”¹¹ Many such gestures were never named as heterodoxy, sedition, or heresy. While “the ‘habit’ of dissent” certainly “found expression through the vehicle of popular heresies,”¹² this was far from being its only (or necessarily its most culturally significant) vehicle. Dissent, difference, radicalism—call it what you will—existed far beyond the boundaries of juridical denunciation, whether religious or secular. It frequently resisted colonization by “heretics”—or “heretics” did not deem it worthy of their colonization. The radicalism of Chaucer’s *Pardoner’s Prologue and Tale* and *Wife of Bath’s Prologue and Tale* is, I believe, of that order: not a determinate of Lollard heresy but rather an array of gestures of difference which is uniquely Chaucer’s own.

I dedicate *Fallible Authors* to my daughters: to Sarah and Katherine, with love from your fallible father.

Authority and Fallibility in Medieval Textual Culture

“We elected a president, not a pope,” Barbra Streisand is reported to have said of Bill Clinton, when the allegations about his sexual escapades were flying thick and fast.¹ Betty Friedan agreed: “It is of no consequence to me what Clinton does in his private life. . . . All that is important is his public policies.”² Other voices condemned him for falling beneath “the standard of behavior we expect from Presidents,”³ for having brought the high office of the President of the United States into disrepute. “Though elected by people and filled by men,” this “office has a sacred quality,” wrote Hugo Young.⁴ “The most powerful democracy in the world invests its leader with a special eminence as head of state as well as head of government.” And yet— though Clinton “set a bad example” and “certainly [is] not a man of character,” his “lies weren’t about public business.” Young continues: “He wasn’t caught knowing from the start that the Sudan factory he bombed had nothing to do with lethal weaponry. In a quotidian matter, he lied.” Moving from 1998 to 2005, and to another president, the situation seems to have been reversed. A major cause of then-current anxiety was whether George W. Bush, marketed to the American people as a “man of character” (with the probity of his personal life apparently unassailable), knew from the start that Saddam Hussein had little if anything to do with the perpetrators of the 9/11 terrorist attacks—and hence lied about “public business.”

Such distinctions between the awe-inspiring office and the fallible office-holder, between a person’s authoritative public position and his or her private peccadilloes—indeed between transgressions perpetrated within “public business” which affect whole nations as opposed to those committed within the “quotidian” space occupied by a few individuals whose feelings have no wider consequence—would have been familiar to the medieval poet Geoffrey Chaucer. But of course we must be attentive to the considerable cultural differences which determined their specific meanings in time and history. I have attempted to pay such attention in focusing on the apparent division—sometimes it looks like a wide gulf—between the two facets which, following medieval culture’s dualistic categorization, came to constitute an “authority.” On the one hand, the authority was a figure worthy of respect, belief, and obedience; on the other, the authority

was a mere mortal who was capable of much stupidity and sin. This crucial binary was constructed through late-medieval discourses of office *versus* man (and, in special circumstances, woman), of public *versus* private, and of the ways in which these twains met. Or failed to meet.

My interest, then, is in the array of “official” requirements and restrictions which the embodiment of authority entailed, and the ways in which mere fallible mortals were presented as failing to live up to those demands—whether because they committed high (or low) crimes and misdemeanors, or failed (whether openly or secretly) to practice what they preached. The problem is perennial: how can authority be invested in a corporeal being that is so resistant to rule, to the bridling of its desires? In Chaucer’s day the matter was further complicated by the ubiquitous belief in the inferiority of women. Half of the human race was deemed fallible because its members lived in the wrong kind of material body, the inferior female rather than the superior male form. Despite the constant medieval elevation of spirit over flesh, biological sex was a crucial factor in determining whether a person could hold public office or exercise authority over others.

Such fallibilities could be seen as deficiency, whether due to some lack on an individual’s part or to a general condition which affected an entire sex, as in Aristotle’s claim (frequently reaffirmed during the later Middle Ages) that a woman was a “deformed male.”⁵ Or they could be taken as an affront to culturally sanctioned codes of behavior—perhaps judged a failing with specifically religious implications, identified as sin which demanded punishment in this life and/or in the next. Or, indeed, condemned as deviancy. That last term needs careful definition, given the use of “deviancy” in contemporary parlance to designate specifically sexual behavior. Such a use pervades recent literary criticism of Chaucer’s Pardoner in particular, his (allegedly) homosexual preferences being presented as a challenge to the heteronormative principles endemic in late-medieval culture. The matter of whether the Pardoner’s body and behavior are “deviant” in this way—or in some other (can he be seen as some sort of “eunuch,” for instance?)—is certainly important, and so I have treated it at some length. But it does not fill all the available ethical space; there are other kinds of sin in question, and on public display. The broader moral purchase of the term “deviancy” will therefore be reclaimed below, in light of the standard meaning of the medieval Latin verb *devio*: “to turn from the straight road, to go aside, to deviate.”⁶

That is the sense present in Boethius’s *De consolazione philosophiae*, Book III, met. viii, when Dame Philosophy laments how ignorance leads wretched men astray on a devious path:

More specifically, a person who fell into heresy was deemed to have deviated from true Christian doctrine, as may be illustrated by a passage from the first of Simon of Cremona's *Disputationes de indulgentiis* (c. 1380), a work to be discussed in Chapter 1 below. Anyone who advocates an "indiscreet indulgence" is a heretic, Simon declares, for heresy involves two things, an error in reasoning and a stubbornness of will, blatant deviation from the truth (*a veritate deviare*). Moving on to examples in Middle English, Thomas Usk's *Testament of Love* (c. 1385) describes the period from the beginning of the world to the advent of Christ as the time of "deviacion, that is to say, goyng out of trewe way."⁸ And in the A-fragment of the *Romaunt of the Rose* the lover tells Dame Resoun that he is "so devyaunt" from her "scole" that he has not been helped at all by her doctrine (4787–91).

Chaucer translates the abovementioned passage from *De consolatione philosophiae* as follows, in his *Boece*: "Allas! Whiche folie and whiche ignorance mysledeth wandrynge wrecchis fro the path of verray good!"⁹ This idea of "wandrynge" reappears in Chaucer's initial description of the Wife of Bath, who has been to Jerusalem three times—"She hadde passed many a straunge strem"—and also visited Rome, Boulogne, Compostella, and Cologne. The narrator concludes that "She koude muchel of wandrynge by the weye" (I(A) 464–67); presumably Chaucer was influenced here by the common understanding of *deuius* as "extra viam ire." Apparently Alisoun's enthusiasm for pilgrimage has not kept her on the straight and narrow path of Christian morality. The same could be said of her sparring partner the Pardoner, also a keen pilgrim. We may recall that he embarked on the Canterbury pilgrimage shortly after returning from Rome, and has the veronica badge—along with a "walet . . . / Bretful of pardoun"—to prove it (I(A) 685–67).¹⁰ And little good has it done him: he is, quite shockingly and scandalously, not a "man of character." In the Wife of Bath's case, her moral lapses are exacerbated by the fact that she was born into an inferior, female body—of which she seems belligerently proud, while struggling to cope with the fact that it is now past its physical prime.

These complexly "deviant" and mobile characters, the most blatantly fallible of Chaucer's "authors" in the *Canterbury Tales*, are my chosen subject. Of course, the Pardoner and Wife of Bath are not "authors" in the sense that they have inscribed their doctrine textually, for within the frame of Chaucer's fiction the narrations for which they demand respect remain oral, unrecorded. My point is rather that they are the bearers of authoritative materials and methodologies, and perform certain official functions (sometimes

going far beyond what was deemed permissible). Here one should recall the crucial interconnection in medieval culture of the concepts “author” and “authority.” According to the common etymology, the term *auctor* was related to the Greek noun *autentim* (“authenticity,” “authority”).¹¹ It designated at once an agent and a person of *gret auctorite*, not necessarily in the realm of “literary” production. To appropriate a comment by John Guillory, “Canonical authors are not markedly different . . . from their contemporary workers in the medium of power; they have only chosen a strangely durable medium, the text.”¹² My ambition is to place Chaucer, as a maker of texts, alongside his contemporary workers in the medium of power, thereby relating his discourses of authority and fallibility to the larger ideological sources and structures that gave them meaning.

A related concept which requires initial definition is that of “publication.” As a *quaestor*,¹³ Chaucer’s Pardoner collects alms for a hospital and dispenses “pardons” or indulgences (which were generally believed to relieve purgatorial punishment for sin); the “publication” of the origin and value of the indulgences was regarded as an essential part of this process. Here I use the term in the common late-medieval, and pre-print, sense of “making public” or “proclaiming” information, announcements, edicts, and the like.¹⁴ The Latin verb *publicare* and its Middle English cognate *publishen* also feature in relation to (for example) an act of preaching¹⁵ or a sinner’s public revelation of his sin.¹⁶ Such activities could involve *publicacioun* understood as transmitting information in and through writing—but not necessarily so, as may be illustrated with reference to Chaucer’s most famous use of the concept, when he declares the bad name of Criseyde is “*publysshed* so wide / That for hire gilt it oughte ynough suffice” (V, 1095–96).¹⁷ Here the poet has in mind the spreading abroad of Criseyde’s guilt in general, a process in which textualization is not deemed essential and is certainly not specified, though it may be assumed to have played some part. Both the Pardoner and Alisoun of Bath “publish” (in this broad sense of the term) their faults, failings, and limitations along with their moral lore, in ways which—I will argue below—set major medieval discourses of authority and fallibility in sharp, compelling contrast.

Chaucer was particularly attracted to such discourses, for reasons that can only be guessed at. Perhaps there is a connection here with his interest in the writer not only as *auctor* but also as *fictor*, i.e., an inventor, maker, or liar, to follow the ubiquitous medieval etymology: “the fables (*fabulae*) of the poets are named from *fando*, because they are not true things (*res factae*) but only spoken fictions (*loquendo fictae*).”¹⁸ We may recall how, in the *House of Fame*, Chaucer reduced Homer—Dante’s philosopher-poet *par excellence*—to one who “made

lyes, / Feynynge in hys poetries" (1477–78), and went on to suggest that textual fame itself may be a pack of lies, or at the very least "compounded" of "fals and soth" (1029). The written record's apparent inability to give people what they deserve licensed Chaucer to reverse the fate commonly endured by women, as the regular victims of masculinist history. Hence in the *Legend of Good Women* he is ostentatiously "favorable"¹⁹ to the female sex, in *Troilus and Criseyde* resists producing yet another book which will "shende" (ruin, disgrace) the heroine (V, 1060), and in the *Wife of Bath's Prologue* has Alisoun confront the truism that the lion is painted by the hunter, i.e., women are textually depicted by misogynistic male clerics (III(D) 688–92). Boccaccio had devoted much time in his *Genealogia deorum gentilium* to the argument that the poets are not liars because they do not intend to deceive;²⁰ Chaucer, I suspect, was intrigued by fiction's power to deceive—or, at best, to offer alternatives to what, in his culture, passed for truth. This would explain his evident fascination with the moral disquisition of a character who is set up for condemnation in the strongest terms (the Pardoner), and his willingness to put words of the most profound wisdom into the mouth of a character who embodied some of the most virulent antifeminism of his time (the Wife of Bath).

But guesswork this must remain. And, to borrow a passage from Chaucer's friend John Gower,

I may noght strecche up to the hevene
 Min hand, ne setten al in evene
 This world, which evere is in balance:
 It stant noght in my sufficance
 So grete thinges to compasse . . .
 Forthi the Stile of my writinges
 Fro this day forth I thenke change
 And speke of thing is noght so strange . . . (*Confessio amantis*, I.1–10)

Henceforth I will investigate the discourses of authority and fallibility without which those characters could not exist, seeking insight into the forces that drive them.

Writing around the middle of the 1390s, Chaucer had the most offensive character on his Canterbury pilgrimage present the case that an immoral man can tell a moral tale: "For though myself be a ful vicious man, / A moral tale yet I yow telle kan" (VI(C) 459–60). Many two-faced figures exist in anticlerical satire, of course; the Pardoner's descent from Faus Semblant in the *Roman de la Rose* is well known. But Chaucer is, I believe, unique in the way that he pushes such duplicity to extremes: the Pardoner is an *exceptionally* "vicious man"; his narrative comprises an *exceptionally* powerful "moral tale." A sharp distinction is being made between reliable words and unreliable

speaker, between the truth of what is said and the falsity of the person saying it. Several decades earlier, in a different country and within a very different society, Francis Petrarch had made a similar distinction. Writing to his long-dead correspondent Cicero, he explains: “It was your life (*vita*) I criticized, not your ingenuity (*ingenium*) or your eloquence, for I admire the first, while the second strikes me dumb with wonder.”²¹ Cicero’s *vita* was marred by weakness in adversity and inconstancy, Petrarch believed. Yet the achievement of the “great founding father of Roman eloquence” was considerable. These statements by Chaucer and Petrarch belong within a sophisticated matrix of ideas concerning the relationship between authority and fallibility (ranging through various sorts of errant or “deviant” behavior). Its distinctive discourses are evident in many spheres of social, political, and ecclesiastical/theological theory and practice.

In the first instance, Petrarch’s segregation of Cicero’s dubious *vita* and wonderful *ingenium* may be seen as a move away from some of the values of the medieval “ethical poetic,” to use the late Judson Allen’s felicitous term.²² In the *accessūs* or “academic prologues” to glosses on the Latin canonical texts studied in the grammar schools, the “branch of philosophy” to which those books belonged was regularly discussed, to establish their ideological credentials and justify their inclusion in a Christian curriculum.²³ In the case of a wide range of syllabus authors (Aesop, Ovid, Horace, Juvenal, Virgil, etc.) the subject-matter treated was usually identified as moral philosophy or ethics, and so those authors became regarded as authorities in the study of human behavior. By these means such texts were “authenticated” in the medieval sense of the term, their prestige and *auctoritas* being secured. The concomitant was that the poets had to be of good character, men—for men they invariably were—worthy of respect and belief. Hence the learning and prophetic powers of vatic Virgil, and the social outrage of satirists like Horace and Juvenal at the evils of their age, were emphasized. Ovid, the expert on sex and seduction, was a particularly difficult case, but a measure of moral conformity was imposed on his poems. The *Amores* and *Ars amatoria* remained resistant, but their damage was limited through the construction of a *vita Ovidii* which claimed that the poet, exiled by the Emperor Augustus on account of his scurrilous verses, had repented of what he had written and produced other texts (particularly the *Remedium amoris*) which asserted his change of heart.²⁴ According to this interpretive model, Ovid had left his youthful misdemeanors behind him, and attained that wisdom which age (and painful experience) brings.

Fascinating problems arose when, in the later Middle Ages, certain vernacular writers sought to locate and empower their writings, and

those of distinguished contemporaries, in relation to the systems and strategies of textual evaluation which academia had produced. Their sense of the worth of the vernacular in general and their own writing in particular impelled them irresistibly in that direction. But there was a major stumbling block; the shade of Ovid, as it were, haunted such attempts at valorization. Vernacular secular literature had human love as a major subject, and how could a poet who wrote about love, and/or expressed his own (limiting and probably demeaning) emotional experiences, be trusted as a fount of wisdom, accepted as a figure worthy of respect and belief? An *auctor amans* was an utter paradox, almost a contradiction in terms.

Dante met the problem with typical vigor. His *Convivio*, which is ostentatiously based on the medieval genre of the commentary on an *auctor*, elaborately brings out the profoundly scientific subject-matter of three of his *canzoni*. The point is being made that Dante's vernacular works merit the full scholarly apparatus of commentary which for generations had been reserved for Latin *auctores*. Moreover, given that a (would-be) *auctor* has to have an impeccable character, Dante is anxious to emphasize that his life is not letting down his lyrics. The reader of these *canzoni* may have formed the impression that he had pursued a great passion of love, Dante admits. But in fact the motivation (or "moving cause") was virtue, as, he promises, the subsequent expositions will make clear.²⁵ Any potential threat to the authority of the text or the good character of its author is then refined out of existence by the techniques of allegorical exegesis.

However, in his *Trattatello in laude di Dante* Giovanni Boccaccio chose not to adopt such a defensive strategy. Instead he flatly declares that all his life Dante suffered from licentiousness: "Amid such virtue, amid such learning as we have noted there to have been in this magnificent poet, lust (*lussuria*) found most ample space."²⁶ "But who," Boccaccio asks, "among mortals can play the just judge in condemning it? Not I." The attractions of the female sex are very powerful, as is proved by both secular and sacred literature. No reasonable person can gainsay the testimony of holy Scripture, which offers the *exempla* of Eve's persuasion of Adam, David's adultery with Bathsheba and murder of her husband, and the story of the wise Solomon who, "to please a woman," kneeled down and worshipped Baalim. Dante, then, may not be excused, but some comfort may be found in the fact that many other great writers experienced similar difficulties. The clear implication is that *amor* need not necessarily destroy *auctoritas*; the moral virtue of a text may survive the lapses of its author.

Those "sinful authors" Solomon and David are invoked to similar effect in what is probably the most daring defense of Jean de Meun to

figure in the *querelle de la Rose* of the early fifteenth century. Pierre Col went beyond all analogies with Ovid—a major strategy in the *querelle*—to appeal to the precedent of Biblical lovers.²⁷ Chancellor Jean Gerson had attacked the *Rose* on the grounds that “he who made it was a foolish lover.” Why then, Col retorts, does Gerson not make similar charges against Solomon, David, and other foolish lovers, who lived long before Jean de Meun, and “whose books are made a part of holy Scripture and their words a part of the holy mystery of the Mass”? It was “a foolish lover” (David) who “caused Uriah the good knight to be killed by treachery in order to commit adultery with his wife.” It was “a foolish lover” (Solomon) “who caused the temples with the idols to be built for the love of strange women.” If they are not to be condemned, neither should Jean de Meun.

Col raises the stakes even higher by comparing Jean de Meun’s situation to those of Saints Peter and Paul. Those revered *auctores* were more firm in the faith after they had sinned, he declares; similarly, Jean de Meun, because he had been a foolish lover, was very firm in reason, for the more he knew by his own experience the folly of foolish love the more he was able to despise it and praise reason. When he wrote the *Rose* he was no longer a foolish lover, and had repented of having been one—as is evident from the fact that he speaks so well of reason. The voice of “Raison,” it would seem, is in large measure the voice of Jean de Meun.²⁸

The ingenious appeals to the Bible by Giovanni Boccaccio and Pierre Col echo a long-running controversy in Biblical exegesis, over how the fallibility of major Scriptural *auctores* could be reconciled with their undeniable authority. For generations theologians had attempted to cope with harsh historical facts concerning the lives of Kings David and Solomon.²⁹ Here the strategies of allegorization were invaluable, David being interpreted as Christ, Bathsheba as the Church, and Uriah as the devil. Alternatively, the literal sense could be confronted, with David, Solomon, and (in a very different capacity) St. Paul being deployed as *exempla* of what to do and what to avoid. St. Bonaventure, writing c.1254–57 in his commentary on Ecclesiastes (then supposed to be by Solomon), affirmed that this work was written not by a sinner but by a penitent man who regretted his sins.³⁰ This is in response to three powerful counter-arguments. First, when a carnal man preaches spiritual things, he scandalizes rather than edifies; therefore this book is likely to cause scandal rather than edification.³¹ Second, in Psalm 49:16 we hear God saying to the sinner, “Why dost thou declare my justices?” a dire penalty being threatened for such presumption (cf. v. 21. This *auctoritas* was to resonate through scholastic discussions of the immoral present-day preacher, as discussed in Chapter 1 below).³² If Solomon was a sinner,

therefore he sins by declaring the divine justice. Third, a good author builds up faith, promotes trust and confidence. But an evil one does not—in conflict with the aim of holy Scripture, which is to generate faith. Bonaventure responds by affirming the opinion of Jerome that Ecclesiastes was the work of a repentant man. Because God does not cast away those who are repentant, it follows that Solomon was not in a reprehensible state when he wrote this book. Furthermore, Bonaventure continues, it may be argued that the holy Spirit speaks what is true and good not only through the good but also through the evil. Hence our Lord advises that we should “do what they say, not what they do” (cf. Matthew 23:3). He prophesied most clearly through the problematic Balaam (cf. Numbers 23 and 24); likewise, God said many good things through Solomon, although he was a carnal man. Solomon’s sin had nothing to do with his teaching, but everything to do with his failure to behave as he ought.

Arguments like this were probably in Col’s mind when he challenged Gerson’s reading of the *Rose*. Its implication seems to be that a writer’s amatory experience does not necessarily invalidate his work—providing that he has put his *amours* behind him (like David, and indeed like the chastised Ovid). But what if a writer does not leave his love behind? If, as in the case of Dante as described in Boccaccio’s *Trattatello*, the emotion persists? That is a far more difficult proposition to defend. But Col, to his intellectual credit, tries to do just that in a later part of the letter quoted above.³³ First he argues that in itself to be a clerk, a philosopher, or a theologian is not irreconcilable with being a foolish lover—witness the examples of David, Solomon, and others. Indeed, he adds, some clerics even say that Solomon wrote the Song of Songs on account of his love of Pharaoh’s daughter. Why, one could bring forth “more than a thousand examples of people who were clerks and at the same time foolish lovers”! These roles are as compatible with one another “as being at once clerk and knight,” as were Pompey, Julius Caesar, Scipio, and Cicero.

Col then proceeds to taunt Gerson by suggesting that the Chancellor should not judge others by himself. Because he is a clerk, philosopher, and theologian without being a foolish lover, he assumed that all men behaved similarly. Which is manifestly not the case. Moreover, even if the great Gerson were, in the future, to become a foolish lover, that would not make him any the less a clerk—at least, not at the beginning of this passion.³⁴

This vacillation is fascinating. On the one hand, Col does not want to set aside the argument that Jean de Meun composed his poetry not as an actual lover but as a repentant one. On the other, he is tempted to go for the more daring proposition that even if Jean had written the

Rose while under the influence of foolish love, this would not have interfered with the text's clerkly, philosophical, and theological achievements. And here perhaps he comes close to Petrarch's attitude regarding Cicero, as described above. A man can do his job and exercise his professional skills whether or not he is weak in adversity, inconstant in his loyalties, or in love/lust. On the same argument, the intellectual and rhetorical skills necessary to produce brilliant poetry or prose are not destroyed by an author's moral deficiencies. It seems that we can trust an author's text, even though in certain cases we cannot trust the author himself. The inference could be drawn that, if we cannot trust the teller, at least we can trust his tale.

The significance of this and related issues can be appreciated better if we move beyond the specifics of textual authorship and authority to consider the wider context in which they belong. For medieval *auctor*-theory did not occupy some sort of autonomous, specially privileged site of its own ("aesthetic," literary-critical/theoretical or whatever) but rather partook of discourses which feature crucially in accounts of the formation of the king, the pope, the priest, the preacher. . . . This point may be substantiated in the first instance with reference to the "political theology" behind the notion of "the king's two bodies." Here, of course, I am indebted to Ernst H. Kantorowicz's brilliant study of that subject (originally published in 1957), which retains much of its original challenge.³⁵

Writing around 1100 in his *De consecratione pontificum et regum*, "the Norman anonymous" speaks of the "twin person" of the king, "one descending from nature, the other from grace." In one sense, he was, by nature, an individual man (*individuus homo*); in another he was, "by grace, a Christ-like figure, that is, a God-man (*Christus, id est Deus-homo*)."³⁶ To put it another way, in terms of his *officium* ("office," public role, vocation) the king is the very image and figure of God.³⁷ Such a "yoking of two seemingly heterogeneous spheres" had "a particular attraction for an age eager to reconcile the duality of this world and the other, of things temporal and eternal, secular and spiritual." Unfortunately, in certain formulations the two spheres seemed to be too heterogenous to yoke together. The "danger of a royal Nestorianism" was "great at all times" in discussion of the king's two bodies, Kantorowicz admits,³⁸ here drawing an analogy with the way in which the Nestorian heresy had put asunder the two persons of Christ, His divine and human natures.

Subsequently the relevant discourses pulled in two directions: on the one hand a "more theocratical-juristical idea of government" emerged within the political sphere, while on the other notions relating to the "quasi-priestly and sacramental essence of kingship"

evolved into the late-medieval theory of kingship by “divine right.”³⁹ Future formulations are intimated in the *Policraticus* of John of Salisbury (c. 1115–80), who held the view that “Not the Prince rules, but Justice rules through or in a Prince who is the instrument of Justice.”⁴⁰ “The prince is the public power and a certain image on earth of the divine majesty,” argues John, and “in all matters” he “prefers the advantage of others to his private will (*privata voluntas*),” and indeed “in public affairs” he is “not permitted his own will unless it is prompted by law or equity.”⁴¹ As the bearer of the *persona publica* the prince “punishes all injuries and wrongs, and also all crimes,” not incurring individual blame for the blood which is shed in the process.⁴² Similarly, in his *Summa theologiae* St. Thomas Aquinas O.P. (c. 1225–74), argued that a private person (*persona privata*) has no authority to compel right living; rather the power of compulsion belongs either to the community as a whole or to its *persona publica*, i.e., its ruler, who has the duty of inflicting punishments.⁴³

The risk of anachronism in interpreting such material is great. Kantorowicz has rightly cautioned us against inferring from it the existence of the concept of the “king as a purely private person” in the modern sense of the term. The crucial line of distinction, he believes, should be drawn “between the king alone in his relations to individual subjects, and matters affecting all subjects, the whole polity.”⁴⁴ And the *persona privata* considered as a body should not, of course, be confused with the king’s *material* body; that entity is not specifically covered by the discourse of “the king’s two bodies”—one good reason for not employing that discourse as a crucial analytical paradigm throughout this book.⁴⁵ Of course, the material body *did* matter, and could impact on the metaphoric “two bodies” in crucial ways.

With this caveat in mind, we may turn to consider briefly the distinctions between “public” and private,” the “official” and the “individual,” which emerged in medieval valuations of the figure of the pope. Walter Ullmann has investigated how Leo I (who died in 461) used Roman law to clarify the issue of papal power, identifying as a major change “the separation of the (objective) office of the pope” which originated with St. Peter “from the (subjective) personality of the pope.” For governmental purposes, Ullmann continues, “it was the office of the pope, the papacy as such, which mattered”; the issue of whether someone was a “good” or “bad” pope was not crucial. “The pope as office holder was conceived to be an instrument to execute the office, that is, to translate the abstract programme of the papacy.”⁴⁶ Thus, “subjective standards and personal qualifications were irrelevant as far as the scope and extent of the office were concerned. In other words, within the terms of papal primatial doctrine the validity of a papal act or decree or judgment

did not depend upon the morality or sanctity or other subjective-moral standards applicable to the person of the pope, but solely upon whether or not the judgment or decree was legally valid. . . . The office, in a word, absorbed the man.” Here there is, perhaps, a tendency toward a sort of Monophysitism. On the analogy with the heresy which denied human nature in the person of the incarnated Christ, it might be said that this view of the *officium papae* tends to have the higher, divine element subjugate the lower, human one. However, in the later Middle Ages there were substantial challenges to this tendency. The “intellectual revolution” (as Ullmann terms it) of Aristotle’s teachings, particularly on ethics and politics, contributed to the emergence of “the conception of the individual as a citizen” with specific rights and responsibilities rather than as a mere “subject” who received “doctrine clothed in the law” which had to be obeyed.⁴⁷ At the end of the thirteenth century a “subjective point of view” regarding the papacy became clearly visible. The distinction “between office and person was now beginning to be reversed”: “What began to matter was the personality of the pope, was whether he was a morally ‘good’ or ‘bad’ pope.”⁴⁸

The significance of that disassociation is richly problematic—not susceptible of generalization but rather to be sought in specific times, places, people. To take one particularly telling case, Pope Clement VI (1342–52) was adamant that “the personality of an individual officeholder could not change the nature of the office,” as Diana Wood puts it.⁴⁹ Thus he “strained every nerve to convey a sense of the vast abyss which separated the heavenly office from the earth-bound man.” It is quite true that Clement frequently described himself as unworthy. But such self-abasement may be read as a strategy of self-aggrandizement—behold the frail shoulders on which such a heavy burden of responsibility rests! In other words, “the separation between the person and the office was simply a device to enable the Pope to stress his sovereign status.”⁵⁰ One among many exercises of that sovereign status was the bull *Unigenitus Dei filius*, promulgated in good time for the Roman jubilee year of 1350, which lent papal authority to a doctrine of indulgences or “pardons” from the punishment of sin, as developed by the major schoolmen of the thirteenth century. Here Clement consolidated the papal claim to dispense merit to sinners from the vast spiritual treasury which had been filled by the surplus or supererogatory merits of Christ and his Saints—a point to which we will return in our discussion of Chaucer’s Pardoner *qua* pardoner or “publisher” and distributor of indulgences.

On the other hand, the disassociation of office and man could be deployed to diminish rather than aggrandize the papal office—as often happens in the writings of those who dissented from what the Church

was defining as orthodoxy. For example, in his polemical treatises the Franciscan William of Ockham (c. 1288–1347)—a vociferous critic of Clement VI—deduced various radical consequences from the principle that the power which God had given to men was crucially limited. Certain restrictions had been imposed on the power of St. Peter, which should not be transgressed by his successors. As a mortal man and hence imperfect, there is no way in which the pope can possess all the power which Christ, even as mortal man, possessed.⁵¹ Far from being infallible, the pope “may not add any ‘novelties’ to the evangelical law, especially such as would be grave or onerous.” Indeed, “without the consent of the faithful he cannot regularly command any special fast or abstinence.”⁵² Ockham goes so far as to say that, in the interests of the greater good of the universal Church, circumstances might arise whereby it was better for it not to be ruled by any pope—or, alternatively, to be ruled by many popes.⁵³ Such remarks are devoid of any belief in the mystical inevitability of the figure and office of the pope.

Remarkably similar discourses and dilemmas characterize the late-medieval construction of priestly power and responsibility, as may be illustrated with reference to scholastic discussion of the ministration of the sacraments. Can the sacraments be conferred by evil ministers? Thomas Aquinas puts forward three powerful arguments against this proposition—arguments which we find reiterated, again and again, in academic affirmations of the unsubjective authority of ordained ministry.⁵⁴ First is the challenging question posed by Ecclesiasticus 34:4, “who can be made clean by the unclean?” When ministers lack grace themselves, surely it is impossible for them to confer grace on others? Second, the power of the sacraments derives from Christ, but if the wicked are cut off from Christ, surely they have lost the power of conferring the sacraments? Third, the minister required for a sacrament is one who lacks the stain of sin, as Leviticus 21:17–18 indicates (“Whosoever of your seed throughout their families has a blemish, he shall not offer bread to his God, neither shall he approach to minister to him”). But against all these arguments, Aquinas continues, stands the authority of St. Augustine, who claimed that “the ministry was destined to be transmitted in full to both good and evil. What difference does a bad minister make to you when the Lord is good?”⁵⁵

Aquinas resolves the issue by applying the principle of instrumentality. A minister may be seen as a sort of an instrument, and an instrument acts not of its own accord but through the power which moves it. True, it may possess some other form or power in addition to that which it needs to function as an instrument. But this is irrelevant to its instrumentality. For example, a physician’s body is

the instrument of a mind which possesses certain skills: and it makes no difference to those skills whether the body is healthy or infirm.⁵⁶ (In other words, a physician who is himself sick can make others well.) According to the same principle, it is unimportant whether the channel “through which water is passed is made of silver or lead.” Hence, Aquinas concludes, “the ministers of the Church can confer the sacraments even when they are evil.” They do not cleanse men from their sins, or confer grace upon them, through their own power; the power involved belongs rather to Christ, who works through them as His instruments. But is not the evil minister cut off from the power of Christ? He may be, explains Aquinas, but good effects can be produced through an instrument which itself is lifeless. “Therefore Christ works in the sacraments both through the wicked as through instruments lacking life and through the good as through living members.” Finally, he argues, the minister of the sacrament should indeed live a life which is free from the stain of sin, because that is appropriate and fitting behavior for such a person—but personal goodness is not essential for effective conferral of the sacraments.

What, then, of preaching the word of God, another major aspect of the priest’s ministry? This was not in and of itself a sacrament, but ordination was, and in the later Middle Ages the ordained priest had preaching as one of his crucial responsibilities and prerogatives. And here again the issue of whether the human agent was a mere instrument or something more important—and potentially more problematic—troubled the schoolmen. Is preaching while in a state of mortal sin itself a mortal sin? How much bearing on this issue has the fact that certain individuals are obliged to preach by dint of their priestly office? Or that, in one case, the preacher’s sins may be public knowledge to his congregation, while in another case they may be secret? Is it permissible for a priest to preach if his sinful state is concealed and private? If, however, his sin is public knowledge, then, irrespective of whether he is preaching *ex officio* or not, surely he sins mortally on account of the scandal he creates?

Some of the answers offered to such perplexing questions will be discussed below in Chapter 1. The Parisian theologian Henry of Ghent (d. 1293) will receive special attention, since his distinction between what might be termed “public” as opposed to “private” sin is one of the most elaborate of its kind.⁵⁷ But his treatment of the problem did not meet with universal approval; in particular, he was criticized by the Carmelite theologian Gerard of Bologna (d. 1317),⁵⁸ another figure whose views feature prominently in our first chapter. The very fact of such a lack of consensus may serve to indicate to us the somewhat tentative nature of scholastic speculation regarding the “non-public” (to use the safest term) ethics of the public man. Moreover, such

disagreements mark (yet again) just how important it is to avoid anachronism in seeking to interpret what, in medieval terms, belongs to the “public” and “private” spheres. When medieval writers spoke of the performance of the *officium praedicatoris* as a public duty⁵⁹ they had in mind matters relating to location (preaching as an activity conducted in church) and audience (preaching as a performance which was, in theory, open to all, whatever one’s status, sex, or ability, offering instruction of a kind which was necessary to help all Christians toward salvation). This contrasted with “private” or “extra” teaching in special circumstances, which could involve one-to-one instruction or addresses to small groups, and did not always require the services of an ordained priest.

Examples of “private” instruction included an abbess teaching her nuns, a layman instructing his wife or familiars in the rudiments of the faith, and a mother educating her children in like manner. These activities were confined within the supposedly “private,” domestic, or reserved (because removed from public view) spaces of family home or nunnery, with proper hierarchical relationships being maintained within each sphere. Women could teach other women or children; it was not permitted for them to teach mixed audiences which included men, due to the perils of sexually provocative female speech. Besides, so the argument ran, men would regard it as unseemly and shameful to be instructed by women. They lacked the authority to preach on account of their inferior subject-position; their bodies were blemished with natural weakness and impurity, and besides only the male form could image Christ sacramentally: hence the ordination of women was deemed to be impossible. Aristotle had described a woman as a “deformed male,” as already noted, and medieval medicine commonly held that male semen naturally tended to produce males, the female being procreated only through a hindrance of this process. For its part, medieval theology held that the *sexus* or gender of women was, in effect, a deficiency which constituted a categorical impediment to female ministry, as our discussion in Chapter 3 will attempt to explain. Even if a bishop attempted to ordain a woman, declared John Duns Scotus O.F.M. (c. 1265–c. 1308), the imprint or *character* would simply not work on her female body.⁶⁰ Caroline Walker Bynum’s highly influential *Holy Feast and Holy Fast* suggests that, through passionate identification of their bodies with the crucified body of Christ, some exceptional Christian women sought, maybe even attained, a “quasisacerdotal” role.”⁶¹ But no matter how much suffering the consuming and consumed female body could achieve, the facts of its biological markers ensured that its possessor could get nowhere near the site of institutional clerical power and authority—the priesthood.

What about those female prophets referred to in the Bible? Did they not constitute a precedent and model for contemporary female preachers? The orthodox answers tended to emphasize that those (very special) women were given their gift for private rather than public instruction, and if men were taught thereby this was by a special dispensation, wherein divine grace did not respect sexual difference.⁶² Such answers will be discussed fully in Chapter 3, with reference to the contributions made by Thomas Aquinas and Henry of Ghent, particularly since this material was drawn on by English theologians in their battle against Lollardy in the early 1390s. It was generally conceded that women can teach privately, in the sense of “familiarily conversing” with a few others (to follow Aquinas’s formulation),⁶³ but not publicly, in church. Within their own religious houses, abbesses and prioresses can instruct their nuns and reprehend vices, explains Thomas of Chobham (c. 1158/68–c. 1233/36), who was appointed sub-dean of Salisbury sometime between October 1206 and *circa* 1208.⁶⁴ But it is not licit for such women to expound holy Scripture by preaching. They can read from the Apostles and from legends of saints, and at their matins read from the Gospels. However, they are not allowed to put on sacred vestments or read from the Epistles or the Gospels at the celebration of the mass, on account of the impurity of their menses and because of the danger of concupiscence, for priests or other clerics upon seeing them would be inflamed with lust.

By the same token, a layman could teach his servants and family, but (unless specially licensed) not a gathering of all-comers in a public place, far beyond the walls of the house wherein he ruled as *paterfamilias*. Every good man should “preach” in his own home and in private places, to his family and neighbors, explains Thomas of Chobham. He may do this by recalling what he has heard in good sermons—thus, by reporting and repeating, he can expound holy Scripture. However, he most certainly may not expound holy Scripture in church or in other public places. Georges Duby is quite correct in saying that “the opposition between private life and public life is a matter not so much of place as of power,”⁶⁵ but in view of the testimonies here quoted I myself would wish to emphasize the conjunction rather than the disjunction of place and power.

When the schoolmen spoke of the “secret” sins of priests they usually did not have in mind the notion of misdemeanors perpetrated within the boundaries of what we might call “personal” or “private” morality, but rather sins of which a priest’s congregation was ignorant. Of course, the schoolmen’s treatment of sins which are perpetrated in the very act of public teaching (including vainglory and flattery) as opposed to those which are not (including covetousness

and lust) raises larger issues. But no-one actually said that it is worse for a preacher to be vainglorious than to be lecherous; neither does the notion of “privacy,” as invoked in attempts to defend President Clinton’s rights as a private individual and citizen, actually apply here. For if the lecherous behavior of a preacher were to become known, it would scandalize the members of his congregation, who would justifiably feel that he was failing to “practise what he preached.”⁶⁶ And in the eyes of his superiors and ultimately of God a sinful priest was just as culpable for his “private” failings as for those committed in the exercise of his office. In short, here we are dealing largely with matters relating to public and private places, information and power, rather than to public and private life as envisaged in later centuries.

In public places, when a priest preached it was deemed crucial that he enjoyed the confidence of his audience. True, it could be (and often was) argued that his personal fallibility did not damage his authoritative message; there was widespread acceptance of the notion that a clever sinner could well make an excellent teacher. But that missed the crucial point, as developed in scholastic thought concerning the *officium praedicatoris*, that a good pastor owed his flock his devotion; rhetorical skill and intellectual competence alone were simply not enough. In practical terms, the sight of an immoral priest exhorting his listeners to moral behavior, or daring to consecrate the sacraments, could cause them deep offense—as when the Viennese Beguine Agnes Blannbekin (d. 1315) records with horror how a congregation recoiled from a priest who, having “deflowered a young virgin,” presumed to celebrate Mass the very next day.⁶⁷ Acutely aware of this problem, the schoolmen put themselves in a difficult (if not ethically dubious) position by promoting a policy of “Don’t ask, don’t tell.” My review of the abundant evidence has indicated a frequent concern, which sometimes smacks of obsession, with official secrecy. If the preacher’s sins become known publicly, he may prove a source of scandal. Better to maintain silence, then, and keep the congregation in the dark, if at all possible or for as long as possible. Thomas of Chobham’s comments on this matter are illuminating, indeed surprising. His *Summa de arte praedicandi* includes a lively attack on those who have proclaimed abroad or “published” (*publicauerunt*) their “sin as Sodom, and they have not hid it” (cf. Isaiah 3:9).⁶⁸ A man can, quite commendably, hide his wickedness out of reverence for God and benefit to his neighbor, thereby avoiding the scandal which “publication” of his wicked works would cause. Thomas excels himself by illustrating this point with reference to the story in Genesis (see especially 31:34) of how the godly Rachel hid the idols of Laban in camel dung (*firmus camelorum*), that being how Chobham interprets the Vulgate text’s *stramen cameli*—actually a reference to a

pack-saddle (or “camel’s furniture” as the Douai translation puts it).⁶⁹ According to the narrative, Rachel hides Laban’s idols under the *stramen*, “and sat upon them,” informing Laban that she cannot get up because “it has now happened to me, according to the custom of women” (i.e., she is menstruating).⁷⁰ Chobham ignores that last detail, interpreting Laban’s gods as customary or habitual sins of the kind attacked by St. Paul when he condemns those “whose end is destruction: whose God is their belly: and whose glory is in their shame: who mind earthly things” (Philippians 3:19). Yet—and here is the main surprise of Thomas’s excursus—such sins should be hidden from those “many plotters and spies who inquire into the sins of preachers.” The prudent preacher should deceive those who inquire into his misdeeds, so that they may be addressed within himself, so to speak; thus, rather than being gloried in, his sins will rot and stink in his heart. And since they should be covered up in this way, a man must, as it were, sit upon his sins and hide them under his posterior regions, ensuring that they do not appear to the sight of men. Just as no-one should bare his bottom in public, neither should he reveal his sins to others!⁷¹

It was not, of course, that any medieval moralist wished to condone a priest’s immoral life. The divine punishment which such a sinner would ultimately suffer was imagined with some relish.⁷² And there are treatises aplenty which describe the purification process through which a priest should pass before presuming to serve his flock—especially before administering holy communion, “confecting” (cf. the Latin verb *conficere*) the sacrament of the Eucharist. The traditional position was that priests who failed to live up to such (fittingly) high standards should be left to God, and hopefully their fallibilities would not become known to their congregations. For, if so, layfolk might presume to judge their superiors, thereby threatening the jealously guarded hieratic relationship between shepherd and flock.

Chaucer’s Pardoner, however, makes no secret of his moral deviancy. Indeed, he positively revels in exhibiting it to the audience of Canterbury pilgrims; given this ostentatious public display, the risk of scandal is great. If the standard scholastic critique were applied, it could be said that the effect of his preaching is thereby destroyed, since the pilgrims are bound to take more notice of his bad personal example than of his good narrative *exemplum*. It is hardly surprising, then, that after his tale is told he should receive insults rather than alms. Moreover, the Pardoner sins in the very act of preaching (in the sense explained above), due to his vainglory and greed for gain—here we are dealing with deviancy appertaining to his relationship with God rather than that with his audience. Of course, he sins in other

ways as well, his lechery being evident (though defining the precise form or forms it takes has proved controversial in current scholarship). Complexity is heaped upon complexity when we realize that pardoners were generally not licensed to preach. Therefore it is possible to argue that—quite apart from his moral unworthiness for the task—Chaucer’s character has usurped an office to which he has no legal right. To make matters even worse, he exceeds his brief as a distributor of pardons, claiming far more for them than his license allows. And could it be that at least some of those pardons—like all of his relics—are fakes? Indeed, is the Pardoner himself a fake, not a properly licensed *quaestor* at all?

These interpretive challenges are further complicated by the fact that, in Chaucer’s day, not everyone was prepared to endorse orthodox attempts to contain the immoral preacher and/or priest. The schoolmen we have cited had carefully demarcated the qualities of the office and the qualities of the man—Lollard theology brought them together with a vengeance. Above, the possibilities of latent “Monophysitism” and “Nestorianism” were tentatively explored in various late-medieval attempts to reconcile abstract authority with human fallibility. Now we may add that certain statements by John Wyclif’s followers shaded into “Donatism,”⁷³ a heresy generally believed to include the belief that, if ministers are unworthy of their ecclesiastical offices, the sacraments they perform are thereby devalued in some way.⁷⁴ The Wycliffite treatise *Of Prelates* claims that “a prest may be so cursed & in heresie þat he makip not þe sacrament”;⁷⁵ a Lollard sermon suggests that, because of their evil life; priests may lose “uertu to mynystre ony sacramentis” or to do anything *medefuly*;⁷⁶ and the third of the Lollard *Twelve Conclusions* claims that the Holy Spirit and His noble gifts “may not stonde with dedly synne in no menere persone.”⁷⁷ According to the record of his second trial, William Swinderby (first charged with preaching heresy in 1382, in Leicester) believed “that a priest being in mortal sin cannot, by the power of the sacramental words, confect the body of Christ, or perform any other Church sacrament whatever or minister to members of the Church”—a charge he vehemently denied.⁷⁸

Similar attributions of Donatist views occasionally appear in the Norwich heresy trials of 1428–31, as when Hawisia Moone is quoted as saying that “oonly he that is moost holy and moost perfit in lyvyng in erthe is verry pope, and these singemesses [‘mass-singers’] that be cleped pretes ben no prestes, but thay be lecherous and covetouse men and fals deseyvours of the puple.”⁷⁹ This brings out well another crucial aspect of Donatism (essential for this, our initial, definition of the term): “sacraments derive their validity from the holiness of him

by whom they are conferred.”⁸⁰ In other words, the best men consecrate the best sacraments. Such doctrine was quite contrary to the ideals of Christian unity, since it held out the (highly divisive) possibility of different individuals ministering and receiving different types of sacrament. St. Augustine, who in the fifth century labored long and hard against the original Donatist sect, was acutely aware of this,⁸¹ and sought a solution in the principle that ordination confers a supra-human authority on any duly appointed clergyman, which keeps his sacraments safe and secure, despite any human fallibilities he may have.⁸² But Wyclif’s supporters chipped away at this principle,⁸³ developing the view that every member of their “true church,” being one of the elect and a recipient of divine grace, “was *ipso facto* more priest than layman, ordained of God.”⁸⁴ Therefore a righteous layman had just as much right (or indeed more right) to administer the sacraments than had an evil, albeit formally ordained, priest. To take one example from many such statements, the Lollard John Skilly “held and afermed that every trewe man and woman being in charite is a prest, and that no prest hath more poar in mynystryng of the sacramentes than a lewed man hath.”⁸⁵

To what extent was John Wyclif himself responsible for such latter-day Donatism, if so it may be called? He definitely was the main target of the London Blackfriars condemnations of May 1382, which included the proposition, “if a bishop or a priest is living in mortal sin he cannot ordain, or confect, or baptize.”⁸⁶ But Wyclif never defended himself against this particular charge (in marked contrast to his prompt reaction to other items on the list), which leads Ian Levy to suspect that the schoolman did not accept the doctrine as his own.⁸⁷ However, his followers Nicholas Hereford and Philip Repingdon, confronted with the same proposition, were obliged to renounce it.⁸⁸ Wyclif’s *De apostasia* (usually dated 1379) does contain the view that the priest who is “foreknown” as eternally damned lacks the spiritual presence (*modus essendi spiritualis*) necessary to confect the sacramental presence (*modus essendi sacramentalis*); this and other passages from the same treatise also appear in the text known as Wyclif’s *Confessio* (usually dated 1381).⁸⁹ On the other hand, elsewhere Wyclif asserts the (basically orthodox) view that the sacraments of a priest who is “foreknown” and living in moral sin are useful to his subjects.⁹⁰ And yet, in a sermon of 1382 he suggests that “foreknown” priests administer beneficial sacraments only *secundum quid* (i.e., in a relative and therefore perhaps inadequate fashion).⁹¹ Even more daringly, in his *De antichristo* (1384) Wyclif says that there is nothing in the Bible to support the belief that God must assist every faithless prelate in consecrating the sacraments.⁹² Most radical of all is the statement in *De Eucharistia* that one mass may be despised and

condemned by God while another is deemed meritorious; the host consecrated by the good priest, who best signifies Christ's union with the Church, must be better than the host consecrated by the bad priest, who impedes that signification.⁹³ Levy seeks to explain such apparent contradictions by positing a crucial development in Wyclif's thought, a "discernible movement in the direction of Donatism" which was "closely linked to his rejection of the doctrine of transubstantiation."⁹⁴ "Perhaps scholars will have to be content to say that there were times when Wyclif had been orthodox, times when a Donatist, and other times still when he had walked a perilous path between."⁹⁵ While Wyclif was not constructing a position "he was prepared to defend obstinately," Levy further suggests, nevertheless he was quite willing to engage in "provocative speculation."⁹⁶

Many examples of such "provocative speculation" (on this as on so many other matters) may be found in Wyclif's writings. One must suffice here, a passage from his *Responsiones ad argumenta Radulphi Strode*, Strode having been a Fellow of Merton College, Oxford, before 1360 and probably to be identified with the "philosophical Strode" who is one of the addressees of Chaucer's *Troilus and Criseyde* (V.1856–57).⁹⁷ Wyclif declares that the faithful who by true belief and love are members of Jesus Christ (who is the archpriest) are themselves *sacerdotes*, thanks to the spiritual oil of predestination. The implication is that in this respect they do not need to receive the material oil traditionally used in the ordination service. The *officium* of priest is often bestowed on those who are unfit for it, continues Wyclif, and it may be right for the true sons of God to perform that office, even though they may not have been consecrated by a bishop, and lack the priestly tonsure and the *character* (or sacred imprint) which ordination imposes. Now, while this certainly does not go so far as to say that the sacraments ministered by such unfit priests are useless or at least dubious, it does raise the specter of valid ministration by non-ordained individuals who derive their authority directly from God. Perhaps Wyclif rather enjoyed going so close to the brink of Donatism. Some of his followers may have gone over it.⁹⁸

Another Wycliffite doctrine which threatened to drive a wedge between authoritative *officium* and fallible office-holder was the theory of dominion.⁹⁹ According to Wyclif, *dominium* meant divine right of possession: the right to hold power, whether spiritual or secular, depended on grace.¹⁰⁰ No pope, bishop, or king had true dominion over his subordinates while he lived in a state of mortal sin.¹⁰¹ One of the 1382 Blackfriars propositions took the form, "if the pope is foreknown [to be damned eternally], and a bad man, and consequently a member of the devil, he has no power over Christ's faithful."¹⁰² By the same token, the status of the deviant priest, one

who failed to “lyuen wel in clennessen in þouȝt & speche & dede & good ensample to þe peple,”¹⁰³ was highly suspect, and the value of all his works questionable. The most crucial priestly office, according to Wyclif and his followers, was “trewe preching”: “riȝt preching of goddis word is þe moost worþy dede þat prestis don heere among men.”¹⁰⁴ Therefore anything which interfered with it came in for the most stringent of criticism: “þis synne þat lettith þis gendrure crye to god to be a-vengid.”¹⁰⁵ Traditionally, the mercenary preacher was to be tolerated; the office should be respected even if the office-holder cannot be. But according to Wyclif, such a man should be shunned by his congregation and be subject to punishment—by the secular authorities, if necessary. In *De veritate sacrae scripturae*, for example, it is argued that prelates who live an ungodly life forfeit their sacerdotal privileges.¹⁰⁶ Similarly, John Purvey (reportedly) held that anyone holding the office of priest or bishop who did not set a good example in his life, incurred excommunication by God.¹⁰⁷

A particularly worrying implication of the abovementioned doctrines, as interpreted by at least some of Wyclif’s followers, was that personal righteousness transcended the boundaries and barriers of gender. If a woman is in a state of grace *that* is what empowers her rather than an official dispensation of the Church hierarchy; in such a state she has as much right to preach and to administer the sacraments as has a similarly disposed man. “Donatist (or near-Donatist) denials of the validity of the sacraments administered by unworthy priests led to claims for a lay ministry,” Margaret Aston has written, “and these in turn opened the way to further claims,” including the argument in favor of women priests.¹⁰⁸ The Dominican inquisitor Bernard Gui (c. 1261–1331) complained of the Waldensians’ belief that “the consecration of the body and blood of Christ may be made by any just person, although he be a layman” (providing of course he was a member of the sect), adding that “they even believe the same thing concerning women.”¹⁰⁹ Here, as in many other respects, the doctrinal trajectory of Lollardy may be said to parallel that of Waldensianism. But did Lollard women priests actually exist? This is a matter of modern scholarly debate, though the balance of opinion would seem to be against the hypothesis. Of course, a lot depends on what is meant by “priesthood” within a theology which devalues the sacraments (as traditionally understood) in general. It would seem that the *theory* had great potency and challenge even if the practice was minimal, particularly in view of the strength of the establishment’s response to the views of Walter Brut, a Welsh Lollard who dared to argue that women could preach and (at least in certain circumstances) administer the sacraments, including the sacrament of the altar. But there is a twist to this particular tale. As I demonstrate

in Chapter 3, much of its theory was generated by the team of expert theologians recruited by John Trefnant, Bishop of Hereford, to refute Brut's views; in the process of building up the Lollard's views in order to knock them down, they canvassed opinions which were far more radical than anything that Brut himself had held, inasmuch as we can judge from the records of his trial.

At any rate, the orthodox view persisted that a woman could not be a *doctrix*, *auditrix*, or *praedicatrix* ("teacheress, studentess, preacheress") except in the most exceptional of circumstances; those bizarre Latin forms, coinages redolent of a tiresome academic humor, point to the monstrous nature of any such creature. Because of her natural and legal inferiority, and possession of the wrong type of body, woman could scarcely ever be an *auctrix* ("authoress"). The *Wife of Bath's Tale* may be read as offering a tacit comment on this status quo. Therein a physically repellent old woman, her body disfigured by old age and the ravages of poverty, teaches quite irreproachable doctrine. If the female form is incapable of authoritative *characterization* then it must be de-formed in order that its possessor may become an acceptable medium for the transmission of a high message.

There is, of course, much more to Chaucer's creation of the Wife of Bath, including a bold eroticism which owes much to Ovidian realizations of gender and sexuality. But Dame Alisoun cannot be contained within discourses which would serve to limit her potency, write her off as yet another Dipsas or duenna-figure whose expertise is confined to stereotypically female skills. So blatantly does she confound such expectations that another of Chaucer's fictions, the Friar, is moved to advise her to leave authorities to preaching and to the schools of the clergy. In his view, her discourses of authority are unfitting in the mouth of a woman.

Ye han heer touched, also moot I thee,
In scole-matere greet difficultee.
Ye han seyn muche thyng right wel, I seye;
But, dame, here as we ryde by the weye,
Us nedeth nat to speken but of game,
And lete auctoritees, on Goddes name,
To prechyng and to scoles of clergie. (*Friar's Prologue*, III(D) 1271-77)

The sources and significance of the Friar's unease will be sought in Chapters 3 and 4. Suffice it to note here that, in the tale which the Wife tells, a romance text is turned inside out to present an ugly old woman as the intellectual and moral superior of a rapist-knight. Thus the conventional dictum that "gentle is as gentle does" is given new life, the claim that nobility of soul is to be valued over nobility of birth becomes more than a pious cliché. Moreover, women may be valued for their wisdom rather than their beauty; the repulsive (to the male gaze which, predictably, is the dominant viewpoint of the text)

body of the old woman fades into insignificance as her voice utters the most authoritative and compelling of statements, Dante, both poet and sage, being ostentatiously cited as a major source. One of the most repulsive bodies in the *Canterbury Tales* houses a mind and soul which are in possession of an impressive body of doctrine. And she is the creation of an aging woman who, in her own self-portrayal, professes corporeal appetites of a kind which had been zealously condemned by generations of clerics. On the same argument, the possibility that the Pardoner's body—whether physically imperfect, effeminate/feminized and/or sullied by lust (heterosexual or homosexual?)—may be militating against his presumption of authority serves to problematize even further an already fraught depiction, offering the prospect of even deeper deviancy.

Archbishop Arundel's *Constitutions* of 1407/9 sought to eradicate all the dangerous Wycliffite opinions which had been circulating at the time when Chaucer was creating those perplexing "fallible authors," the Pardoner and Wife of Bath. The *Constitutions* denounced unlicensed preaching, banned mention of the sins of the clergy or anything which might undermine orthodox instruction on the sacraments in sermons aimed at the general public, and forbade all other teachers from concerning themselves with disputatious matters of theology. Unlicensed translation of Biblical passages into English was also forbidden—and this applied not only to the "Lollard Bible" in whatever version, in part or entire, but also to extracts from the holy Scriptures as included in vernacular books and treatises, and indeed those vernacular books and treatises themselves. Moreover, the ownership of an English Bible translation made in the time of Wyclif or later was prohibited, except in the case in which special diocesan permission had been given.¹¹⁰

In the Oxford translation debate of circa 1401 scholars had clinically debated if knowledge of God should hierarchically proceed from the Latinate clergy to the laity, if layfolk could cope with a text so stylistically difficult as the Bible, and if the barbarous English language was capable of serving as a vehicle for the communication of divine truth.¹¹¹ When issues of social control impinged on the consciousness of the Church authorities, however, the situation acquired a new urgency. They "came to see that the vernacular lay at the root of the trouble," "that the substitution [of English for Latin] threw open to all the possibility of discussing the subtleties of the Eucharist, of clerical claims, of civil dominion, and so on."¹¹² In such a climate, all English writings, no matter how much or how little theology they contained, no matter how unimpeachable their orthodoxy may have been, could fall under suspicion. In the later

fifteenth century a copy of the *Canterbury Tales* was produced for the prosecution during a heresy trial. As Anne Hudson says, if this manuscript “had included, for instance, the Pardoner’s Tale, or, even more, the Parson’s Tale, it could on a rigorous interpretation” of the relevant Constitution have been “regarded as indicative of heresy.”¹¹³ One might also mention *The Wife of Bath’s Prologue and Tale*, which features a woman who is highly competent in the academic discipline of disputation and adept at deploying authorities from the Bible and the writings of the Church Fathers. Writing in 1415 in the wake of the Oldcastle rebellion, which was seen as a consequence of Lollardy, Thomas Hoccleve warned women to keep to their station in life. Given that they are weak-minded and uneducated, “lewed calates” [i.e., strumpets] should confine themselves to spinning and traditional sources of gossip rather than vainly attempting to construct arguments based on the Bible and to engage in disputation on topics from which God has barred them.

Some wommen eeke, thogh hir wit be thynne,
Wold argumentes make in holy writ!
Lewed calates! sittith down and spynne,
And kakele of sumwhat elles, for your wit
Is al to feeble to despute of it!
To Clerkes grete / apparteneth þat aart
The knowleche of þat, god hath fro yow shit;
Stynte and leue of / for right sclendre is your paart. (144–52)¹¹⁴

Alisoun of Bath has done all this, and more—for she tells a tale in which the social order is challenged inasmuch as a poor woman of low birth manifests moral dominion over a churlish aristocrat. Nicholas Watson makes the point well that the *Canterbury Tales*, “playing, as they so disruptively do, with the most important contemporary arguments over teaching and religious authority,” are “a product” of “a world which is crucially pre-Arundelian.”¹¹⁵ The post-Arundelian world was very different—a narrower, more repressive one.

And yet—as already noted, Chaucer’s Friar *does* voice his concern about the Wife of Bath making arguments in holy writ and engaging in the “aart” of disputation which is the prerogative of “clerkes grete”: his admonition to leave the *auctoritees* “to prechyng and to scoles of clergye” probably had as much resonance in the 1390s as it would have had in the early 1400s. The contrast between these two eras should not be made too sharply. It would be imprudent to exaggerate the scope of Chaucer’s intellectual freedom and the extent to which he could safely play with “important contemporary arguments,” make game out of earnest, and/or say true words in jest. Take, for instance, Harry Bailly’s reaction to Chaucer’s “povre Persoun of a toun,” a man “riche . . . of hooly thoght and werk” (I(A) 478–79). When this highly idealized figure takes Harry to task for his virulent swearing, he

exclaims, “I smelle a Lollere in the wynd,” and warns the Canterbury pilgrims that this “Lollere” is going to “prechen us somewhat” (II(B1) 1173–77). Harry seems to be in a jocular mood. He is not saying that the Parson is an actual Lollard, merely that right now this man is talking like one (the reference being to Lollard contempt for oaths).¹¹⁶ And he is perfectly happy to introduce the Parson’s “predicacioun” rather than making any move to censure or curtail it. The Shipman, who now insists on telling his own tale, continues Harry’s highly reductive comparison by imagining that the Parson will preach exclusively from Biblical quotations and introduce “difficulte” (hard and/or controversial material), sowing cockle (a weed) “in our clene corn” (1180–83). In other words, if the Parson continues to act like a Lollard they can expect the clean corn of orthodoxy to be infiltrated and sullied with the weeds of heresy. Here, then, two inveterate swearers join forces to combat what they construct as excessive religiosity, their weapon being ridicule—the Parson is being put down by having his religious zeal insultingly likened to Lollard extremism. But deadly earnest may be seen as underlying this game—an argument which may be supported by a complaint in Alexander Carpenter’s *Destructorium viciorum* (1429) about how those “who hear cursed transgressors of God’s commandments daily blaspheming God with lies and horrible oaths” are “ashamed to silence them and refrain from such transgressions themselves, lest they be called Lollards and heretics, or of the Lollard sect.”¹¹⁷ A more comprehensive protest had been made a little earlier, shortly before 1426, by John Audelay, priest to “be lord Strange” (presumably Lord Strange of Knokin, in Shropshire).¹¹⁸ In the second of the poems which survive uniquely in Oxford, Bodleian Library, MS Douce 302, Audelay objects to the way in which poor devout priests can be branded as Lollards and hypocrites, their ardent devotions and unceasing work for Holy Church being valued as nothing.

Ȝif þer be a pore prest and spirituale in spiryȝ,
 And be deuoute, with deuocion his seruise syng and say,
 Pay likon hym to a lollere and to an epocryte;
 Ȝif he be bese in his bedus þe Prince of heuen to pay,
 And holde hym in hole cherche dule vche day
 Oute of þe curse of cumpane, and kepe his concyans clene,
 He ys a nyþyng, a noȝt, a negard, þai say. (Poem 2, 131–37)¹¹⁹

Of course, the remarks by Audelay and Carpenter are unequivocally serious, but the similarity between the contents of their texts and Chaucer’s, the level of intellectual consensus which they share, is quite remarkable. Devout and devoted priests can all too easily have their piety misrepresented by their opponents, devalued through glib accusations of heresy—and that is a chilling prospect in any circumstances. These passages seem equally aware of that prospect,

despite the differences of date.

All the essential constituents of Wycliffite thinking were in place during Chaucer's period of literary productivity, and their dangers had been broadcast within the élite group of which he was a member. While attempts to procure Wyclif's formal condemnation in England were unsuccessful until the Blackfriars Council of 1382, in 1381 John of Gaunt—Chaucer's patron as well as Wyclif's—had disassociated himself from the schoolman due to his radical views on the Eucharist.¹²⁰ Indeed, 1382 is a crucial year in the history of Lollardy for many reasons. Three of Wyclif's major academic supporters, Nicholas Hereford, Philip Repingdon, and John Aston, publicized their similar eucharistic views in London by means of vernacular handbills and posters, and one of the greatest of the early Lollard evangelists, William Swinderby, had charges brought against him by Bishop Buckingham of Lincoln.¹²¹ Swinderby has been credited with converting Sir John Oldcastle to Lollardy. Another of his converts—or at least a person whom he influenced highly whilst proselytizing in western Herefordshire—was Walter Brut, whose heterodox views on women performing priestly functions will be discussed fully in Chapter 3 below. Brut was tried by Bishop Trefnant of Hereford during the period 1391–93. In 1395 a party of Lollards pulled off a major publicity stunt by affixing their *Twelve Conclusions* to the doors of Westminster Hall and St. Paul's.¹²² According to the *Annales Ricardi Secundi*, among this group were four of the “Lollard Knights” as named by the chroniclers Thomas Walsingham and Henry Knighton: Richard Sturry, Thomas Latimer, Lewis Clifford, and John Montagu.¹²³ The poetic texts on which this book focuses, the prologues and tales of the Pardoner and Wife of Bath, are generally believed to have been written in the mid-1390s. It is impossible to prove how much Chaucer knew or cared about historical events of the kind I have been illustrating, but the supposition that he was unaware of all of them strains skepticism too far. His friendship with at least some of the “Lollard Knights” (an exceptionally literate group) is surely significant, though the caveat must be entered that the extent of the Lollardy of such figures as John Montagu and John Clanvowe, impressive poets both, is debatable, and the slipperiness of what the authorities deemed to constitute as Lollardy in this period should also be recognized.¹²⁴

Furthermore, the great appeal of early Wycliffism to the English aristocracy should not be underestimated. Indeed, according to Michael Wilks, Lollardy started out as a court-centered movement, Wyclif having “from the beginning considered himself to be the spokesman *par excellence* for the king and the court” in their fight against papal lordship.¹²⁵ Or, to be more precise, the schoolman

grafted “an appropriate theology” onto the existing “anti-papalism” of “the families who administered the king’s government as a court party.”¹²⁶ Wyclif’s teachings on civil and ecclesiastical dominion had much to offer those families.¹²⁷ In material terms, they would be the beneficiaries of the disendowment of church property, and in moral terms, they would serve as the guardians of the English church, ensuring that its officials did their job properly and that a stringent reform program was implemented.¹²⁸ But this alliance of mutual self-interest between Wycliffism and state power was not to be. Seeking the support of the hierocratic clergy in a time of need,¹²⁹ Richard II bit the hand that would have fed him. Thomas Walsingham recounts how, “inflamed by the holy spirit” and judging it more necessary to give succor to the imperiled church than pursue his temporal affairs to their end, the king returned home early from Ireland (in 1394), following a plea by the Archbishop of York and the Bishop of London.¹³⁰ The Lollard Knights soon felt the force of the new policy. Richard set about rebuking certain high-ranking individuals, “threatening them terribly” if they gave aid or comfort to the Lollards. He seems to have made an example of Richard Sturry, who was one of his chamber knights—at least, Walsingham singles Sturry out as having received a severe dressing-down from the king himself. On this occasion Sturry was ordered to renounce his heterodox views, and threatened with “a most horrible death” if he ever violated this judgment. It seems reasonable to suppose that Chaucer’s friends among the Lollard Knights (perhaps even Sturry himself)¹³¹ would have told him something about this traumatic event—which may have come as quite a shock to the old retainer, particularly if Wilks is right in supposing that hitherto royal servants had got the message that protecting Wycliffites and expressing sympathy with Wycliffite views (perhaps even holding them) was what their lords and masters expected.¹³² Long before Archbishop Arundel published his infamous *Constitutions*, Lollards and their supporters could feel—with good reason—in grave danger.¹³³

Sturry’s indictment is dated 1395 by Walsingham. That was also the year in which, on a much happier occasion, Froissart presented the king with a luxuriously bound volume “about love.”¹³⁴ Sturry had played a major role in organizing this audience, as the Frenchman gratefully acknowledges.¹³⁵ But Froissart is silent on the subject of his patron’s supposed heresy, and of the specific views Sturry actually held, or is supposed to have held, we know nothing. We do know something about the (alleged) Lollard views of another chamber knight, Lewis Clifford, although the record is deeply frustrating because it leaves so much unexplained. When Clifford (again, according to Walsingham) recanted in 1402, he sent Archbishop

Arundel a list of conclusions which, he claimed, were held by the Lollards.¹³⁶ They include the propositions that the seven sacraments are only “dead signs” (the sacrament of the altar being a mere “morsel of dead bread”), that purgatory does not exist, that clerical celibacy was not ordained by God and hence all in religion can marry, and that consent alone is required for marriage (without any role being played by the church). K. B. McFarlane found this account slightly “fishy,” feeling that “the views Clifford is made to ascribe to the Lollards are wilder than usual.”¹³⁷ Could it be, then, that, under duress, Clifford exaggerated such Lollard views as he knew of, in an attempt to distance himself far from them and impress upon Arundel the strength of his repudiation? Perhaps, but it should be noted that all the Clifford conclusions may be paralleled (in some shape or form) in other records of Lollard belief (and indeed can be traced back, however circuitously, to the thought of the arch-heresiarch himself).¹³⁸ For example, those relating to marriage find clear and substantial parallels in the Norwich heresy trials of 1428–31, and in the few surviving testimonies to the views of William White, a Lollard evangelist in that region who had practiced what he preached by taking a wife—quite illegally, since he was an ordained priest. Such beliefs will be discussed in Chapter 4 below, as part of a review of the (actually quite tenuous) Lollard theology of marriage, which was undertaken to ascertain whether or not any analogies may be found with Chaucer’s own treatment of the subject. Clifford’s conclusions indeed seem “wild,” but they may be deemed as being, in large measure, representative of certain strands of Wycliffite thought, and it is quite possible that Clifford himself once held views like that. Or something like that.

Clifford brought from France to England a copy of Deschamps’ poem in praise of Chaucer, wherein Clifford himself is named. Elsewhere Deschamps calls Clifford “amorous,” which presumably means that the Englishman is being complimented on his knowledge of the then-fashionable doctrine of *fin amor*.¹³⁹ This seems very far from Lollard attacks on the use of “fables of the poets” in sermons,¹⁴⁰ or the complaint of “William Thorpe” against those pilgrims who, en route to Canterbury, listen to pipes and bagpipes, sing loudly, ring their bells, and generally make more noise than if the king himself were passing through with his trumpeters and “manye oper mynystrals.”¹⁴¹ Give them a month “oute in her pilgrimage,” complains Thorpe, and for as long as half a year afterward many of them will be “greete iangelers, tale tellers and lyeris.” Thorpe’s interlocutor in this self-aggrandizing account, Thomas Arundel himself, promptly accuses the Lollard of being a “lewid losel” who has not considered the matter sufficiently. It is a good thing that pilgrims

should have with them both singers and pipers. If one of them should hurt his toe and make it bleed, why should he or his companion not begin a song or produce a bagpipe to drive away “þe hurt of his sore” with such “myrþe”? “Wiþ sicke solace þe traueile and werinesse of pilgrymes is liȝtli and myrili brouȝt forþ.” Here, then, Arundel plays the role—a highly unusual one, according to the tenor of much recent scholarship—of defender of appropriate forms of recreation and artistic “solace” (albeit of a highly practical kind).¹⁴² At this point Thorpe (assuming that he is indeed the author of this narrative) is seeking to present Arundel in an unflattering light, but one may easily envisage Deschamps’s admirer Richard Sturry, “amorous” Lewis Clifford, and that great teller of Canterbury tales, Geoffrey Chaucer, siding with the archbishop in this instance at least. Many of the tales told by Chaucer’s pilgrims would have been deeply offensive to Wycliffite sensibilities. Indeed, many Lollards would have condemned the very basis of Chaucer’s fiction—the pilgrimage itself—and much that went with it.¹⁴³

In the light of all this, several general caveats may be offered. The first concerns the danger of making totalizing statements about Lollardy, particularly Ricardian Lollardy, given the range of beliefs which were tarred with that same brush. A movement or sect which could include Lewis Clifford and William Thorpe had to be capacious indeed. Second, demotic Wycliffism—to coin a phrase—was alive and well in Chaucer’s day; we do not have to await the early fifteenth century to see its emergence.¹⁴⁴ Wyclif and his most ardent academic supporters had addressed themselves *ad populum*, preaching *in vulgari* far beyond Oxford (London, Leicester, Bristol, Northampton, etc.),¹⁴⁵ and the *populus* made of this doctrine what they would, accommodating it to their specific and sometimes conflicting interests, material as well as religious. Hence it is misleading to view William Swinderby as an individual “portent” of a future dumbing-down of Lollardy—little else being expected of “half-educated and usually unbeneficed mass-priests,” the unprepossessing “channel by which Lollardy was to be transmitted to future generations.”¹⁴⁶ Such condescension obscures the point that “watery and simplified version[s]” of Wyclif’s “novel doctrines”¹⁴⁷—a quite inadequate way to characterize views which often have their own robust logic—are to be found in such Lollard testimonies as the *Twelve Conclusions*, Walter Brut’s *cedulae* and *The Examination of Sir William of Thorpe*, in chroniclers’ reports of views (supposedly) held by the Lollard Knights, in developments of Wyclif’s thought (insofar as they can be constructed) by close associates like Nicholas Hereford, Philip Repingdon, John Aston, and John Purvey, and indeed in the lists of condemned propositions extracted from the teaching of Wyclif

himself. For Wyclif's opponents, as much as his followers, sometimes made blunt instruments out of the theologian's subtle and shifting speculations. The range and variety of views possible within Lollardy, and/or the range of views which could pass as Lollard,¹⁴⁸ must be recognized and respected, for example, when we seek to discover Lollard sympathy, or the lack thereof, in the work of those most elusive and tantalizing of thinkers, Chaucer and Langland.

By the same token, in the house of orthodoxy there were many mansions. It is all too easy to discover heresy, heterodoxy, subversion, and so forth if one is unaware of the intellectual leeway which was possible within orthodoxy, or fails to recognize the range of disagreement which orthodoxy could accommodate, even in the time of Wyclif. Those trends have been all too common in criticism of Middle English literature. That is why much space has been devoted in the present book to developments in theology which pre-date Wyclif and which continued to inform English Catholicism during, and long after, his controversial career. My critical judgments remain my own, of course, and there is no necessary causal link between an abundance of information and an appropriate interpretation. Suffice it to hope that even those who disagree with me may find some material in this book which will further their own research. My final (and deeply personal) caveat: we should be wary of reconstructing the Lollards as avatars of religious freedom and free expression (or indeed as prototypical sons and daughters of trade unionism or the Marxist revolution). There was a grimly puritanical strand in Lollardy (or at least in certain branches of Lollardy) with the potential to annihilate sacramental beliefs and devotional practices which had been in place for centuries—a taste of which may be gained from the systematic material destruction which followed Henry VIII's breach with Rome.

It just might be added, in Richard Rex's words, that "the scattered and sporadic burning" of Lollards was "hardly a reign of terror: it never even approached the scale of the 1530s or the 1550s,¹⁴⁹ let alone that of the Spanish Inquisition under Ferdinand and Isabella."¹⁵⁰ But I am uneasy with Rex's overall conclusion that "the Lollards were neither numerically significant in their own time nor of great importance for the course of English history."¹⁵¹ Significance cannot be determined by body count alone, and the consequences of Lollardy for English history cannot be dismissed with the claim that we have been beguiled by "the romantic appeal of the Lollards as a criminalized minority."¹⁵² While it may be admitted that "the distinctive features of late medieval English Catholicism were not shaped to any great extent by Lollard pressures,"¹⁵³ there are numerous proofs of the impact of Archbishop Arundel's *Constitutions*, and the fears which they fostered

had ample precedent in Ricardian England.

One of the major victims of this cultural climate was, I believe, vernacular hermeneutics. An atmosphere wherein just about any Middle English text, however innocuous its use of theological and philosophical doctrine, could be cited as evidence of heterodoxy, was hardly conducive to the emergence (on the continental model, the apotheosis of which was Dante's *Convivio*) of an orthodox and officially sanctioned tradition of commentary, in both English and Latin, on texts which had either been translated from Latin or written originally in the vernacular. That point is given more force by the fact that much of the Middle English Biblical exegesis actually produced in the late fourteenth and early fifteenth centuries was Wycliffite in origin (including the "Glossed Gospels" and the prefatory material included in the various versions of the Lollard Bible, particularly the "General Prologue"). The contrast with the situation in France in the age of Charles V is most telling. Charles enlisted ancient traditions of learning to enhance the prestige of the new Valois dynasty by commissioning over thirty translations of authoritative texts.¹⁵⁴ Most notable among the chosen secular treatises are Nicole Oresme's vernacular versions, including commentary, of Aristotle's *Politics*, *Nicomachean Ethics*, and *On the Heavens*, along with the pseudo-Aristotelian *Economics*.¹⁵⁵ *Le Livre des problèmes d'Aristote*, a translation of the Latin text accompanied by an extensive vernacular commentary (based on Peter of Abano's Latin exposition), was contributed to Charles's translation program by his physician, one Evrart de Conty (c. 1330–1405).¹⁵⁶ To Evrart we also owe a long exposition of an anonymous poem on "The Chess of Love" (the *Eschez amoureux*),¹⁵⁷ which appears to be the first full-scale French commentary on any new French text. Here the move has easily been made from translating existing academic commentary on an authoritative Latin work to providing academic-style commentary on a work written originally in the vernacular.

The progress Evrart made toward a "secular" mythography is especially intriguing. He drew selectively on Pierre Bersuire's *Ovidius moralizatus* (a work which Bersuire had justified in terms of its usefulness to preachers), with the allegorical material which refers to prelates or prelatical theology being systematically reduced.¹⁵⁸ In similar vein, though far more adventurously, those most innovative of medieval literary theorists, Dante, Petrarch, and Boccaccio, drew on religious hermeneutics as they forged their secular apologies for poetry. However, such practice was scarcely credible in Chaucer's day, and quite incredible in the England of Thomas Arundel and King Henry V. The then-prevailing climate of repression of theological and philosophical thinking and writing *in vulgari* was inimical to the

emergence in England of a vigorous tradition of vernacular textual commentary. What happened to Bishop Reginald Pecock was hardly encouraging: even a prominent anti-Lollard polemicist could suffer the same treatment as his opponents. In 1458 or 1459 Thomas Bourghier, Archbishop of Canterbury, instructed rectors and preachers in the province of Canterbury to hand over any of the bishop's books *in vulgari Anglico compositos* which they might possess.¹⁵⁹

Little wonder, then, that there is no fifteenth-century commentary on Chaucer's *Parliament of Fowls* of the type produced by Evrart de Conty, even though the mythography in that English poem merited exegesis every bit as much as that presented by the *Eschez amoureux*. In the prologue(s) to his *Legend of Good Women* Chaucer has the God of Love complain that the *Roman de la Rose* is a heresy against his law—in other words, it supposedly functions as a *remedium amoris* rather than as an *ars amatoria*. Here is the key argument which Jean de Meun's supporters were to deploy in the *querelle de la Rose*. But, Thomas Hoccleve's translation of Christine de Pizan's *Epistre au dieu d'Amours* apart,¹⁶⁰ that controversy found no English *campus duelli*.¹⁶¹ Furthermore, we have no response to Chaucer's Wife and Bath and Pardoner (neither commendation nor condemnation) to parallel those written during the *querelle* about Jean de Meun's La Vieille and Amant, and no-one questioned Chaucer's moral probity because of his creation of dubious *personae* in the way in which Jean was taken to task by Jean Gerson and Christine de Pizan. When the Wife of Bath is mentioned by fifteenth-century writers, she is placed firmly within the limiting, normalizing bounds of antifeminist satire from which Chaucer had done so much to free her, her subversive elements being (perhaps deliberately) omitted from the recollection. Clearly Hoccleve felt more comfortable with Alisoun as a mock-authority (or "auctrice," as he patronizingly calls her)¹⁶² within the typically feminine territory of love and marriage rather than as a "lewed calate" who "wold argumentes make in holy writ," just like those Lollard women whose gender-defying disputation was the butt of invective in his poem against that latter-day Lollard Knight, Sir John Oldcastle (as quoted above). Then again, there is no evidence whatever of a *querelle de Criseyde*, despite Chaucer's attempt to provoke one by questioning his own construction of a faithless woman (cf. *Troilus and Criseyde*, V.1772–85; *Legend of Good Women*, F Prol. 332–40, substantively expanded in G Prol. 264–316). And when that extraordinary instance of Italian self-commentary and self-promotion, Dante's *Convivio*, impacted on Middle English literature it was as the source for quite traditional teaching on true nobility (Chaucer could just as well have drawn on Boethius), as featured in the *Wife of Bath's*

Tale, rather than as the model for autoexegesis by Chaucer or any of his English contemporaries or successors. (The significance of Chaucer's assignment of this prestigious material to a virtuous *vetula* will be discussed in Chapter 4.) As part of the same pattern, when crucial implications of the interaction of authority and fallibility show themselves in Chaucer's work, they do not appear within an *apologia* for some *auctour newe* in the vernacular, of the kind which had been devised by Dante, Evrart de Conty, and Jean de Meun's supporters in the *querelle de la Rose*. Rather they feature in relation to two extraordinary "fallible authors"—one who has appropriated the *auctoritas* and the methodology characteristic of the preacher's role (the Pardoner), and one who has appropriated the *auctoritas* and the methodology characteristic of the lecturer/disputant's role (the Wife of Bath).

The "English Heresy," then, served to set England apart, in respect of vernacular hermeneutics.¹⁶³ Chaucer's French contemporaries spoke a very different language. Nicole Oresme stated that "matters which are weighty and of great authority are delightful and agreeable to people when written in the language of their country."¹⁶⁴ Christine de Pizan, commending Charles V's translation program, declared that "it was a noble and perfect action" to have such works "translated from Latin into French to attract the hearts of the French people to high morals by good example."¹⁶⁵ She then develops the *translatio studii* theme, to make the point that France has now taken possession of a heritage which in days of yore had passed from Greece to Rome. But in Lancastrian England, the English language could hardly function in the same way within orthodox promotion of a transfer of learning and power as expressed in works written in the vernacular. The *translatio studii* topos had been tainted by the Lollards, a fact of far greater cultural weight than the celebratory comments which John Trevisa¹⁶⁶ and Geoffrey Chaucer had made concerning the transference of learning from Greek into Latin and from Latin into English. "God woot that in alle these langages and in many moo" the scientific conclusions transmitted in his *Treatise on the Astrolabe* have been "suffisantly lerned and taught," asserts Chaucer, adding that "diverse pathes leden diverse folk the righte way to Rome."¹⁶⁷ However, subsequent political events in England were inimical to the promotion of such a positive view of the relationship between learning and linguistic diversity. There seemed to be one straight and narrow road to Rome, and anyone who wandered by the way could be at risk. The fate of Reginald Pecock did not bode well for any ambitious attempt to reclaim the vernacular for orthodoxy. It is not surprising, then, that there is no affirmation of the *translatio auctoritatis* from Latin into English of the type which, most memorably, Dante had been able to

make for his own “illustrious vernacular.”¹⁶⁸

In France and Italy, discourses concerning the intersections of authority and fallibility sometimes figured within sophisticated discussions of the ethical credentials of vernacular authors and their texts. In England they manifested themselves in a particularly dangerous way, within a dialectic that (in its most extreme form) questioned the efficacy of the teaching and sacramental actions of a man of great authority if his life did not accord with his official status, and countenanced the possibility of women claiming some of the prerogatives of the *doctor*, *praedicator*, and *lector*. These crucial differences may be seen as both causes and effects of the very different textual cultures of England and of continental Europe. The following book's identification of the peculiarities and problems of the English scene will, I hope, throw light on the ideological conflicts which underpin Chaucer's two most problematic authority-figures, the Pardoner and Wife of Bath.

De officio praedicatoris

Of Preaching, Pardons, and Power

“Three things are necessary for the one exercising an act of preaching,” claims the English cleric Robert of Basevorn in his *Forma praedicandi* of 1322.¹ And they are: appropriate authority, sufficient knowledge, and fitting attributes or *conditiones*—including an impeccable moral character and fine reputation. These categories offer an appropriate framework of analysis for many features of the *Pardoner’s Prologue and Tale*, and we shall be recuperating them in the following chapter. Chaucer displays an interest in all three, though for him the most important category concerns the *conditiones* of the preacher. Does the moral fallibility of the man corrupt his moral message? If the speaker cannot be trusted, can his words? The poet’s confrontation of these issues constitutes one of his most elaborate and sustained investigations of problems which were at the cutting edge of late-medieval theory of textual authority.

Basevorn’s *tria necessaria* are, however, the product of a long process of scholastic disputation and discussion, which bears the hallmark of the thirteenth-century University of Paris, wherein the role and function of the preacher enjoyed much scholarly attention. This is hardly surprising, given that Paris was then the preeminent center of theological learning. Many of the most substantial analyses of the *officium praedicatoris* issued from that intellectual milieu, to spread across late-medieval Europe.² It is important that those intellectual origins be acknowledged, particularly since it was in Paris that the broader theology of priestly authority and fallibility received a remarkably full elaboration, thus establishing the parameters within which the specific *magisterium* of preacher supposedly functioned or operated in parallel. A fundamental premise of the present study is that medieval discourses of authority, far from occupying autonomous ideological and sociopolitical spheres of operation, implicated each other and were crucially interrelated. Late-medieval ideologies of priestly office in general and the office of preacher in particular amply bear out and support this principle— as does the third major ideology discussed below, which concerns the nature and effectiveness of indulgences. Following a gift of alms and the standard penitential procedures, these “relaxations” or “absolutions” were supposed to pay all or part of the sinner’s debt of punishment out of the Church’s vast

spiritual treasury, comprising the immeasurable merits of Christ Himself and replenished with the merits of saints and martyrs both ancient and modern. The Pardoner's claims as preacher are in many respects inseparable from his claims as pardoner, and the value of his discourse is complexly interrelated with the value of his letters of authorization as a licensed distributor of indulgences on the one hand, and on the other with the value of his indulgences themselves. This can be appreciated only after a comprehensive review of the respective yet often comparable powers of preachers, priests, and pardoners, along with the challenges to their institution which came from both inside and outside Christian orthodoxy.

I. CONSTRUCTING THE PREACHER: AUTHORITY, KNOWLEDGE, ATTRIBUTES

Interest in the *officium praedicatoris* was precipitated by many factors, including the emphasis placed by the Fourth Lateran Council (1215) on the clergy's obligation to teach and preach, and the development of the new orders of preaching friars, who rapidly became well represented at university level. Furthermore, the thirteenth century saw a considerable growth in the number of preachers' aids and handbooks: concordances to the Bible, compilations designed to make authoritative doctrine easily accessible, collections of *exempla* or illustrative stories for use in sermons, and *artes praedicandi*, treatises on the forms and rhetorical techniques of the sermons themselves.³ The activity of preaching itself was described in the most glowing terms. According to Humbert of Romans (c. 1200–1277), who was elected Master-General of the Order of Preachers in 1254, the office of preaching is apostolic, angelic, and divine; its foundation, which is holy Scripture, excels all the other sciences.⁴ It is little wonder, then, that late-medieval clerics should have analyzed in minute detail the nature, requirements, and responsibilities of the *officium praedicatoris*.

In discussions of issues of authority and authorization, a firm distinction was made between those who teach by virtue of their public office and those who, lacking such an office, have to be specially licensed. The tensions between the mendicant friars and the secular clergy are clearly evoked by Jean de Pouilly's quodlibet (1312) on the subject, when someone has the privilege of preaching in the parish of a curate who also wishes to preach, which of them has the priority?⁵ Jean, himself a secular master, predictably decides in favor of the parish priest: the priest preaches as an essential part of his function, whereas the friar must have a special commission. Is it possible, then, for a monk to preach, or a layman, or indeed a woman?

An anonymous treatise preserved in Paris, Bibliothèque Nationale de France, MS Lat. 455 assures us that, in accordance with canon law, monks and layfolk can preach only with the special permission of a bishop.⁶ The case of women was more clear cut. Our anonymous treatise flatly declares that women cannot preach because of their nature (they are inferior to men, and were led into error by the devil) and because of civil law, which debars them from public office.⁷ (A full account of such attitudes will be included in Chapter 3, below.) It is hardly surprising, then, that the Wife of Bath's teaching by citation of authorities should have troubled Chaucer's Friar so much (III(D) 1274-77). And we may feel the full force of the Pardoner's joke that, in the case of marriage, the Wife of Bath is a "noble prechour" (III(D) 165). Furthermore, this is a spectacular case of the kettle's calling the pot black, for the Pardoner, like the Wife, has usurped the noble office of preacher—a point to which we shall return.

Moving on to the issues of knowledge and preparation, it may be noted that all the schoolmen insist that the preacher should have adequate learning for his task and prepare himself fully for it. Among many others, Raymond Rigaud took a very dim view of the lazy person who assumes the office of preacher and confessor. Does such a person sin mortally if he chooses not to improve himself through study, though he has the ability to do so?⁸ Applying the Aristotelian theory of causality, Raymond argues that an end or objective (*finis*) necessitates those things which lead to that end, and since performance is the end of the office of preaching, the person who assumes this office is obliged to execute it properly. Proper execution is impossible, however, unless there is an adequate disposition of life and learning on the part of the preacher. The preacher, therefore, must have sufficient learning for his teaching. Anyone who neglects such diligent preparation sins, anyone who despises it sins more gravely, and anyone who lazily and thoughtlessly assumes the office sins most gravely. To hold the office without performing it is of no value and ambitious, to perform it without the right disposition is presumptuous, to be unwilling to acquire that disposition is idle and slothful, to carry out the activity without the proper disposition is thoughtless and dangerous, whereas to neglect and condemn the performance of the office and conceal one's talent is damnable and a great loss. Raymond's comments are absolutely typical of his time.

Moreover, the schoolmen clearly defined the kind of knowledge necessary for the preacher. He should not impose scholastic subtleties on his audience; indeed, academic theology and pastoral theology were firmly distinguished. St. Thomas Aquinas speaks of the "doctrine of preaching, which pertains to prelates," as opposed to "scholastic doctrine," with which prelates do "not greatly concern themselves."⁹

According to the *vita* which Bernard Gui published shortly after Aquinas's canonization (1323–25), the angelic doctor put this theory into practice: "To the ordinary faithful he spoke the word of God with singular grace and power, without indulging in far-fetched-reasoning or the vanities of worldly wisdom or in the sort of language that serves rather to tickle the curiosity of a congregation than do it any real good." In his sermons, Gui continues, Aquinas always used the vernacular; "subtleties he kept for the schools" (note the assumption that subtleties do not belong in the vernacular).¹⁰ Roger Bacon (who entered the Franciscan order at Oxford probably around 1257) made the same point in a characteristically combative way by declaring that it is the job not of the academic theologians but of the *prelati* to explain the articles of faith and morals to the people and to preach to them. "Indeed," he declares, "we know for certain and see everywhere that one simple brother, who never heard a hundred theology lectures, [or] if he heard them still did not care, preaches incomparably better than the greatest masters of theology."¹¹ Another way to make the same point was to distinguish between two fundamental kinds of theological teaching, one confined to the élite clergy and the other deemed appropriate (by that clergy) to the populace at large. Hence Bernard Gui's remark that "to the people" St. Thomas "gave solid moral instruction suited to their capacity; he knew that a teacher must always suit his style to his audience."¹²

In sum, to preach was to address oneself directly and publicly to a congregation in order to instruct its members in the basics of Christianity and to encourage them to act well; it implied a "prelacy" in the sense of a cure of souls.¹³ The teaching of academic theology, on the other hand, did not have as its end the moral improvement of the listeners, but rather their acquisition of knowledge. Hence, a *quaestio* included in Thomas of Chobham's *Summa de arte praedicandi*¹⁴ can state that, although sinners should not preach, they may be permitted to "read" (i.e., lecture on) the sacred page.¹⁵ Thomas argues that the preacher, because of his office, is bound to the cure of souls, and therefore he owes his flock his devotion. A lecturer or master in a school, by contrast, is not responsible for the cure of the souls of his audience. Therefore, if he is a sinner, he is not depriving his listeners of anything because, in the first place, he does not owe them his devotion—and so in his lecturing activity he does not sin mortally. Furthermore, lecturing is not the purely spiritual work that preaching is; the *officium lectoris* is not primarily conducive to the cure of souls but rather to the instruction of the students of some science. Here the roles of the *praedicator* and the *lector* are conceived of as being distinct, each office having its special procedures and objectives.

The issues relating to the personal character of the preacher and

the attributes (*conditiones*) which he should possess were much more problematic and produced a rich harvest of quodlibets. In order to catch something of the flavor of those debates we may turn to Paris, Bibliothèque Nationale de France, MS Lat. 3804A, a collection of notes made by a student at the University of Paris around 1240–50.¹⁶ Here are some of the subjects being lectured on at that time, which formed part of the education of the budding preacher:

- Whether or not it is sinful to preach with temporal reward as a secondary consideration.
- Whether or not it is sinful to preach in a state of mortal sin, having full awareness of that fact.
- Whether or not it is sinful to fail to practise what one preaches.¹⁷
- Whether or not a fat man (*pinguis*) sins by preaching about hunger.
- Whether or not the mercenary man sins by preaching, and if he is to be valued and tolerated.
- Whether or not the preacher who knows that he will scandalize everyone by his preaching, acts badly by preaching to them.
- Whether or not vainglory, which is a venial sin, deforms preaching, and makes it a venial sin.

The Pardoner's implicit *quaestio*, whether or not a sinful preacher can perform a proper act of preaching, is very much at home in this company of quodlibets, its terms of reference being similar or even identical. It is this intellectual context of scholastic debate, as instigated by the Paris schools, reflected in preacher's aids and manuals, and exacerbated by the Lollard controversies, in which many of the problems raised by the Pardoner originated and essentially belong. In order to define the common parameters more exactly we may briefly examine three discussions which have been preserved in fuller form than those recorded fragmentarily in the student's notebook.

The Sinful Preacher: Secrecy, Scandal, and Skill

The first is by the Carmelite theologian Gerard of Bologna, who in 1295 considered the question, is it better to preach and do the opposite of what you preach, than to be silent?¹⁸ After all, man learns better by example than by word. Gerard is adamant that, in absolute terms and with regard to the lesser evil, it is better that an evil preacher should be silent. The act of preaching is indecent in one who acts in a manner contrary to his teaching, and to preach in this way is presumptuous. But what of the person, such as a bishop or curate, who *ex officio* has the duty of preaching? This is a very difficult matter, Gerard declares, because such people are expected to preach and yet, if they live wicked lives, they preach indecently and unlawfully. In the *Cura pastoralis* we read that any man who keeps divine doctrine to himself is accursed, yet elsewhere in the same work St. Gregory attacks those who “investigate spiritual precepts with

shrewd diligence, but in the life they live trample on what they have penetrated by their understanding,” thereby polluting the clear water of truth for their flocks.¹⁹ It appears from this, says Gerard, obviously relishing the puzzle, that in such a case it is bad to preach and it is also bad to be silent.

Gerard attempts to find a way out of the difficulty by making a distinction according to whether the preacher’s sin is notorious or secret. If the sin is unknown to the listeners, and they actually want preaching and are willing to listen, then it is better, or at least less evil, to preach than to be silent, since the audience is not scandalized or provoked to sin, being ignorant of the preacher’s sin. On the other hand, this action seems definitely bad in as much as the preacher is not rightly and reverently teaching the word of God, such teaching requiring a good life and good works of the preacher. If, the preacher’s sin being concealed, the people do not greatly require preaching, it is better, or less evil, to be silent because in this way no offense is given. Similarly, if the preacher’s sin is public knowledge, and the people do not want his preaching or are unwilling to hear it, then silence is the best policy. But if the sin is public knowledge and the people want preaching and are willing to listen, then it is difficult to see which is the best course of action and which is the worse. That such a person should preach is a source of scandal, scandal being defined in terms of a statement or action which provides the occasion for the ruin of others. Because the audience condemns a preacher of this kind his preaching does not profit them.²⁰ According to St. Gregory, “No one does more harm in the Church than he who, having taken the title or rank of holiness, acts evilly.”²¹ Jerome’s attack on those who fail to practice what they preach is then cited. It is clear, therefore, that if someone’s life is despised his preaching will consequently be condemned, as Gregory says. Yet, continues Gerard, hammering home the point once more, it is also evil that such a preacher should be silent because he has the pastoral care of the people and is supposed to teach them, especially since they want preaching and are willing to listen. The obvious solution, of course, is that the sinner in question should renounce his evil life and thus preach in the appropriate manner. If this is not done, there is no obvious solution. This matter is difficult to determine in disputation, Gerard admits; the particular circumstances of place and time must be considered, and each case should be judged on its merits. But, in conclusion, he offers one general recommendation. If, all circumstances having been considered, it seems that the flock would come to greater peril through their preacher’s silence than through his preaching, then it would appear to be less evil for him to preach. If, however, the people would not suffer much from his silence, then perhaps it would be less

evil to be silent and worse to preach.

Our second discussion, part of a *quaestio* included in Thomas of Chobham's *Summa de arte praedicandi*, is of special interest because of its clear definition of the problem rather than for any solution it offers.²² The topic is, whether to preach in a state of mortal sin is itself a mortal sin or not. Three arguments are marshaled in favor of the proposition. It would seem that by no means should such a person preach, since scriptural authority condemns that kind of behavior. For example, in Psalm 49:16–17 God says to the wicked, “What right have you to recite my statutes, or take my covenant on your lips? For you hate discipline, and you cast my words behind you.” Second, since only the person who is without sin can cast the stone (as John 8:7 teaches), only the good man can cast the stone of preaching. Third, David, after his sin with Bathsheba, did not judge or teach until the prophet Nathan assured him that his sin had been forgiven (II Kings 12:13); hence no-one should preach until he knows that his sins have been forgiven by God. The first argument against the proposition is of particular interest to readers of the *Pardoner's Tale*. Just as a man who is in a state of mortal sin may give alms and pray and do other good works, by the same token he can preach and direct the people to good works. Unfortunately, Thomas of Chobham fails to pursue the full implications of this startling yet apparently reasonable idea, being content to offer a version of an argument which we have seen Gerard of Bologna handle with far greater penetration. Distinctions are drawn between preaching *ex officio* and preaching in special circumstances, and between sins which are public knowledge and those which are secret. The sinner who, not required to preach by virtue of office, actually does so out of devotion or owing to the wish of another, does not sin by preaching, providing that his sinful state is concealed. If, however, his sin is manifest, then, irrespective of whether he is preaching *ex officio* or not, he sins mortally on account of the scandal he creates.

The implications of the above-mentioned disturbing idea that the sinful preacher is to be valued are, however, fully explored in our third and last major excursus, this being (in my view) the most substantial and challenging of all the thirteenth-century discussions relating to the *officium praedicatoris*. It forms part of the prologue to Henry of Ghent's *Summa quaestionum ordinariarum*, first written circa 1275–76 and edited toward the end of his career, in 1289. Henry's *quaestio* on whether or not a sinner can be a teacher (*doctor*) of theology²³ displays an acute awareness of the relative demands of technical proficiency and skill in preaching on the one hand, and the purity of the preacher's life on the other. Here Henry brings to bear the apparatus of Aristotelian causality (particularly the theory of

instrumental causality) and Aristotelian psychology (particularly the theory of *habitus* or stable mental condition). He begins by marshaling two arguments in favor of the proposition that the *doctor* of theology need not be a just man. First is the story of the man who did not walk with Christ. The apostles wished to prohibit him from teaching, but Christ said, “Forbid him not,” on the grounds that “he that is not against you is for you” (Luke 9:50). Insofar as he did not remain with Christ he was evil, but if it was not permissible for him to teach theology he should have been prohibited. The second argument in favor is found in Philippians 1:15–19, where Paul says that some of his brothers who are announcing the message are doing it just out of rivalry and competitiveness (whereas the rest preach Christ with the right intention). The fact that they were evil is emphasized by the *Glossa ordinaria*.²⁴ And yet, the Apostle rejoiced in their teaching: “But what then? So that by all means, whether by occasion or by truth, Christ be preached: in this also I rejoice, yea, and will rejoice” (v. 18). Two arguments against the proposition are then offered. First, only those who are illuminated by the light of wisdom, obey the precepts of God, and strongly suggest them to others are suitable for the high office (*magisterium*) of *doctor*. Second, to teach without acting condemns the teacher, as Chrysostom says concerning Matthew 5:19 (“He that shall do and teach, he shall be called great in the kingdom of heaven”).²⁵

Henry begins his own response with a crucial distinction. Someone may be said to be a *doctor* in two different ways: because he is capable of teaching or because he has the office of teaching (*officium docendi*). In the first sense, one is a *doctor* by dint of his state or condition (*habitus*) of knowledge and consequent ability to teach. Such a *habitus* is not dismissed by the act of sinning, any more than it is acquired by virtuous action—though it may be said (following Averroes in his commentary on Book vii of Aristotle’s *Physics*)²⁶ that the *habitus* of virtue disposes one to the acquisition of knowledge. In the passage under discussion Aristotle had explained that knowledge can be acquired only when the soul settles down from the restlessness natural to it. Commenting on this passage, Thomas Aquinas (writing at Paris in 1271) noted that understanding, i.e., speculative thought, and prudence, i.e., practical reason, come to the soul through the rest and abating of corporeal motions and sensible affections.²⁷ The obvious inference is that moral virtue, whereby the restless passions are controlled, is therefore in a sense conducive to intellectual virtue. Through its practice are created the best possible conditions in which knowledge can be acquired. To adopt a metaphor used by Averroes, the process involved is like polishing metal so that it might become a mirror and receive light.²⁸

But Henry is far more interested in the idea that the state of knowledge, once it actually is acquired, is there to stay, and cannot be lost through immoral behavior. In this sense, a man who is evil and a sinner can be called a doctor of the science of theology, for he is able to have correct doctrine just like the righteous man, and indeed he may be better educated than the righteous man in respect of the relevant *habitus* of knowledge. Thus he is a *doctor* of another person by dint of his possession of the *habitus* of this science, and may be compared to the craftsman (*artifex*) who practices his skill in accordance with the *habitus* of that art. Aristotle is quoted as saying that it is not necessary for the craftsman to be morally virtuous in order to exercise his craft.²⁹ In order that an artisan might make good knives, Henry elaborates, he requires not moral virtue but mere proficiency in the art of knife making. The “perfection of the art” of knife making is simply— good knives. The inference is that the good *doctor* (on Henry’s first definition) does not have to be a morally good man.

The second sense in which someone may be said to be a *doctor* relates to the audience’s reception of the teacher rather than his mental state and personal abilities. On this definition, a teacher is someone who holds the office of public teaching (*officium publice docendi*). For this, the approval of the taught is essential. Here the analogy is with the doctor of medicine rather than with the craftsman. No matter how experienced (*peritus*) a medical doctor was in his profession, or however good were the medicines he dispensed, he would not be acceptable to his patients if he was not disposed to make them well. So, if he were irascible, and thereby provoked all his patients to anger, which inevitably would endanger their health, he would not be permitted to practice. Likewise, with the doctor of theology: no matter how skilled (*peritus*) he may be, if he cannot exercise his *officium doctoris* without imperiling his audience, then he should by no means be permitted to teach or to be a teacher of theology. It is necessary to have both the *habitus* of knowledge, as explained above, and a good reputation (*fama bone vitae*). Therefore, in the *doctor* who *de iure* and *ex officio* can and ought to teach this science, two things are required: knowledge (*scientia*) by dint of which he can teach, and a life by dint of which he can teach wholesomely.

Henry proceeds to develop this argument by enlisting the aid of the Aristotelian theory of causality and instrumentality. A *doctor* of sacred Scripture is, as it were, an instrument and organ (*instrumentum et organum*) of the word of God,³⁰ inasmuch as he teaches the faithful with regard to their spiritual health or profit(*utilitas*). Hence the *Gloss* on Matthew 3:3 (“a voice crying in the wilderness . . .”) identifies John the Baptist as the voice and Christ as the Word which cries in

John.³¹ For just as with an instrument or organ, the formal disposition and its own constituent material is determined by its objective or end (*finis*) and the material in respect of which it functions. At this point Henry draws on the second book of the *Physics*, where Aristotle had explained that certain things are required in order that a given product can come into being, but the product comes into being on account of some end, and not on account of those requirements.³² Aristotle had used the example of a saw, which is designed to carry out something and for the sake of something; this end, however, cannot be achieved unless it is made of the right stuff. If we are to have a saw and perform the operation of sawing, it must be made of iron. As Averroes puts it, the action of sawing cannot be achieved except on account of the form and material of the saw.³³ Thus, to return to Henry, the end determines the material, the end being impossible to attain without the necessary material. Henry gives an elaborate version of the “saw” example and makes his own application of the underlying doctrine. In order that a saw can cut straight through tough wood, it must be made of strong and firm metal and it must have teeth: that is to say, the material out of which the tool is made (strong metal) and its formal disposition, pattern, or shape (its teeth) are determined by its end or objective (cutting the wood) and the material on which it works (the hard wood). The material with which the teacher of holy Scripture has to work are the faithful whom he must instruct; the end toward which he works is their own (spiritual) health or profit and that of others through instruction; the material employed in this work is his knowledge; the formal disposition necessary in himself in order that he might realize his objective is a holy life—he himself must first do the things which he teaches others to do.

Any unlearned man who usurps the office of teaching and does not announce Christ with sincerity deserves utter damnation, Henry continues. The saw, if it is made of soft metal, cannot divide the wood. Likewise, an individual who is learned but unjust in his behavior may be able to instruct the faithful, but is quite unable to “enform” or shape them in holy life or to maintain them therein. As Chrysostom says on Matthew 5:13 (“you are the salt of the earth”), the *doctor* should be adorned with all the virtues, so that he is able to prompt the lazy and sluggish to perform good works, by his example rather than by mere words.³⁴ The good manner of life of a priest may, irrespective of words, maintain the holy in sanctity by its example, but without words he cannot lead the ignorant to knowledge of the truth. On the other hand, words, without the example of good behavior, can lead a certain ignorant person to the knowledge of truth, but without the example of good behavior such a one could not remain in faith or

holiness. A priest whose life does not match his words is a source of scandal. Even though he may perhaps lead the good to the knowledge of truth, he will tend rather to keep bad people away from the truth. As St. Gregory says, the *magisterium* of pastor is confounded when one thing is done and another is taught; consequently, when someone's life is despised it follows that his preaching will be condemned.³⁵ To which Henry appends that Aristotelian saw. Just as, if a saw is without teeth it cannot directly attain its end in cutting, so no *doctor* who is not "enformed" by familiarity with holiness can wholesomely teach others. It must be said, therefore, that the proper teacher of this science must not only be competent to teach the truth but also be good and just, so that he should enact the same. Acts 1:1 tells how "Jesus began to do and to teach," which the *Gloss* explains as meaning that the good teacher should first do and then teach, in that order, so that his word is not destroyed by his work.³⁶ On this argument, then, the sinner or unjust man cannot be a *doctor* of holy Scripture.

However, there are degrees of prohibition, it would seem, some errant teachers being more relevantly sinful than others. For Henry distinguishes between different types of evil and the corresponding types of deviant *doctor*. Either such a person believes what is contrary to true doctrine, as the heretic does, or he acts against true doctrine, like the man who sins in his behavior. Someone who is a sinner in the first sense cannot teach at all, nor be a doctor of this science, for he is excommunicate and he will corrupt his audience. In the second sense, the sinner is one of the faithful and has sound doctrine, but does not lead a good life.

A further contrast is then posited, between public sin and private sin. Is the deviant teacher's sin hidden, the man himself being of good reputation? Or is it manifest, the man being infamous on account of his evil life? If it is hidden, the sinner may be teaching to flatter and please, or out of vainglory; here we are dealing with sins perpetrated in the very act of teaching (*ex ipso actu docendi*).³⁷ Alternatively, he may be a sinner on account of another kind of act (*ex actu alio*), for example because he is covetous, lustful, or the like. In the first case, we are dealing with sins perpetrated in the very act of teaching. The man who is steeped in those sins should not teach of his own volition, but rather should hold back. Yet it is undeniable that the Gospel should be proclaimed. Philippians 1:18 declares that "by all means," whether in pretense or in truth, Christ should be preached. This, explains the *Gloss*, describes the various types of *doctor* who preach of Christ but not in the same way.³⁸ Henry identifies three types: the good pastor, the mercenary, and the rogue. The good pastor proclaims the truth (of Christ) in truth, the mercenary occasionally proclaims the truth, while the thief and rogue denies the truth and makes away with

it. The good pastor is to be valued highly, the mercenary tolerated, and the rogue is to be treated with suspicion. A mercenary is said to be someone who preaches for gain. The heretic who preaches falsehood is rightly called a thief. The (good) pastor, however, is the man who preaches what is true and in accord with God.

Henry then proceeds to make his own view crystal clear. Some treat the mercenary just as if he were a heretic. Their argument is that the mercenary preacher who sins in his behavior, even though this is not done publicly, nevertheless acts contrary to what he teaches, and therefore sins by so doing. Consequently he should not teach, because no-one should do what he himself condemns. But this, Henry declares, is not reasonable. For if a sinner who is living in sin can, by good actions which fall inside the parameters of goodness (*de genera bonorum*), put himself in the position whereby he could receive *gratia de congruo*, it would not be right to say that he sins by so doing. Moreover, he may do other things *de genera bonorum* which are of benefit to others. That is to say, by helping others he might help himself spiritually.

How, then, should we regard the teacher whose sin is secret, if the sin may be judged a matter of personal morality rather than falling within the very act of preaching itself? (Assuming, of course, that such a person does not teach anything against Christian truth—in contrast to the heretic— and is therefore not excommunicate.) Henry's answer is that, although he secretly fails to practice what he teaches, this type of teacher is useful to others, and because he may make personal spiritual progress by so doing (as with other works of mercy performed in this life), it is perfectly lawful for him to teach, and for him to be a *doctor* of theology. And what of the teacher whose wicked life is manifest and infamous? He should not, insofar as it lies within his own power (*quantum est ex parte sui*), teach at all, because by so doing he will scandalize his audience. However, on account of the faithful (but not on his own account) he may be heard, providing that he has sound doctrine and is permitted to teach by the Church, not having been removed from his office. If such a teacher is rejected by the Church, he should not be listened to by any means.

Gerard of Bologna, who produced his own *summa* between 1313 and 1317, expressed the view therein that Henry of Ghent was unclear in his analysis of the case where a teacher of theology sins in the actual act of teaching.³⁹ Furthermore, he seems to have been concerned that Henry was underrating the culpability of the sinful preacher who sins through another kind of act (*ex alio actu*).⁴⁰ Sins of both types can be hidden, Gerard argues, and it cannot be said that a man is preaching from wicked intention more in one case than in the other. Why should the preacher who sins *ex actu predicandi* be deemed

to be committing mortal sin while the preacher who sins in a different way be regarded as liable to benefit spiritually from the help which he gives others through his doctrine? Gerard inclines to the view that in neither case should the sinful preacher be able to benefit.

That is a telling point; however, the strengths of Henry's excursus are considerable. His approach to the problems of public and private morality, of manifest and secret sin, is one of the fullest of its kind, and distinguished by the extent to which it seeks to balance the conflicting claims of idealism and pragmatism. Thereby it affords a good instance of how scholasticism could generate thought about society and take actual society into account in its thought. And it should be appreciated that, like Gerard of Bologna, Thomas of Chobham, and all the other schoolmen who addressed themselves to the knotty problem of the deviant preacher, Henry was struggling to make his ideological apparatus and logical equipment fit the exigencies of actual and probable real-life situations which were—and still are—difficult or even impossible to reduce to order and rule.

Art *versus* Virtue: The Challenge of Aristotle

Many of the ideas canvassed in thirteenth-century considerations of the sinful preacher/teacher are, however, so startling that their origins demand investigation, particularly the notion that intellect and knowledge need not coexist with moral virtue. Like so many of his contemporaries who worried over the same issue, Henry was heavily influenced by (although he does not mention it in the *quaestio* under discussion here) Aristotle's distinction between art and virtue as propounded in the second book of the *Ethics*.⁴¹ Averroes, commenting on the relevant passage, explains that, for a craftsman to attain perfection in his art it is enough that the artifacts he produces are good.⁴² By contrast, for a man to lead a virtuous life he must be virtuous in himself and perform virtuous actions, these things being equally necessary. For example, he should both perform just and chaste (*castus*) actions and himself be just and chaste. Similarly, Aquinas, expounding the same passage, describes Aristotle's central point as being that "there is no similarity in art and virtue since works of art have in themselves what belongs to the perfection of the art," whereas virtues are principles of actions that do not go out into external matter but rather remain in the agents.⁴³ Hence actions of this kind are perfections of the agents. And that is why, Aquinas continues, Aristotle asserts that, in order that actions be justly and temperately performed, it is not enough that what is done be good, but the agent must work in the correct manner. His account of the three aspects of this "correct manner" follows and elaborates on what Averroes had said in his commentary.⁴⁴ First, the person performing a

virtuous action should do it not just by chance or fluke; he should know what he is doing. Second, it should not be done out of passion, as when a man performs a good action out of fear. Neither should it be done for any motive other than the wish to do good, “as when a person performs a good action for money or vainglory.” Rather, good actions “should be done for the sake of the virtuous work itself which, as something agreeable, is inherently pleasing to him who has the habit of virtue.” Third, people should be virtuous consistently, without variation or vacillation.

The wherewithal necessary to distinguish between art and virtue has here been provided. Only the first of these requirements for virtue, namely knowledge, is required in the arts. A man can be a good artist, Aquinas says, even if he never chooses to work according to art and does not persevere in his work. But in the moral sphere, action and perseverance really matter; doing is more important than knowing. Action produces the moral *habitus* rather than the other way round; by performing just and temperate actions a man becomes just and temperate. Hence, “knowledge has little or no importance in a person being virtuous,” this being Aquinas’s phrasing of Aristotle’s own statement (as rendered by a version of Robert Grosseteste’s translation) that mere knowledge has little or no importance as far as the virtues are concerned: “Ad virtutes autem scire quidem parum aut nihil potest.”⁴⁵ That dictum was to resonate through generations of scholastic treatments of the nature of ethics, of the relative merits of intelligence and action, of the qualities essential for the Christian teacher. Here our main concern is with the crucial point that knowledge and moral virtue are distinct because the end of moral science—like, we may add, the end of the science of theology—is not knowledge alone, “which those enslaved to passion can perhaps gain” (to quote a gloss from an earlier part of Aquinas’s *Ethics* commentary).⁴⁶ This is a concomitant of the principle that the conditions and operations which produce a moral *habitus* are quite different from those which produce an intellectual *habitus*. As Aquinas says elsewhere (in his *Summa theologiae*), for a human to act well “it is requisite that not only his reason be well disposed through a habit of intellectual virtue, but also that his appetite be well disposed through a habit of moral virtue.”⁴⁷ Socrates’ belief that as long as a man possesses knowledge he cannot sin is, therefore, “based on a false supposition.” (This notion was, of course, criticized in Aristotle’s *Ethics*.)⁴⁸ Can, then, intellectual virtue exist without moral virtue? After all, “intellectual virtue, which is perfection of reason, does not depend on moral virtue, a perfection of the appetitive part.”⁴⁹ Aquinas’s response is that intellectual virtues can indeed exist without moral virtue (with the exception of prudence). And this—to return to

Aquinas's commentary on the *Ethics*—is why Aristotle and his interpreters reject the opinion of those who, thinking “they can become virtuous by philosophizing,” talk about virtues rather than exercising them.⁵⁰ Which is like saying that those who hear the advice of medical doctors but disregard it will enjoy good bodily health. Moral virtue is not a matter of theory alone, it requires appropriate behavior of the teacher and of the taught.

Here, then, is the intellectual tradition behind (*inter alia*) Henry of Ghent's two definitions of the *doctor*: someone who is capable of teaching because he has the requisite *habitus* of knowledge, and someone who has the office of teaching (*officium docendi*), being acceptable to auditors who, because of his own good life, trust him to do them some good. Henry's discussion seems to be somewhat unusual, however, when placed in the perspective of the other *quaestiones* on the same and related issues (as illustrated above), because they tend to focus on the *praedicator* rather than work with the more inclusive term *doctor*, and some of them make the relevant Aristotelian distinction between moral and intellectual virtues altogether more cogent by identifying the respective duties of the *praedicator* and the *lector*, as in Thomas of Chobham's treatment of the subject.⁵¹ The *lector*'s brief is simply to improve the minds, rather than save the souls, of his auditors. Knowledge (*scientia*) is not a moral virtue, Thomas continues, because, as Aristotle says, it does little or nothing to lead one to the virtues—a reference to the seminal passage from Book ii of the *Ethics* which we discussed above. *Ad virtutes autem scire quidem parum aut nihil potest.* ⁵² The fundamental difference between this type of approach and Henry's is obvious. However, Henry had no hesitation in employing the basic distinction between preaching and lecturing in several other *quaestiones*. Perhaps in the case of art. XI, qu. 5 he wished to treat the problem of the sinful teacher in its most comprehensive and widest aspect and hence the term *praedicator*, being too specific for his purpose, was passed over in favor of *doctor* as the central term.⁵³ However, I find more persuasive the hypothesis that Henry found the *praedicator/doctor* distinction, as applied in this context, far too reductive and misleading, perhaps even quite at variance with the truth of the matter as he saw it. For an essential part of the message of his *quaestio* on the sinful teacher is that even an immoral preacher (whether his immorality was concealed or public knowledge) could be conceived of as having some function as a teacher, even though he was certainly not a living *exemplum* of good conduct. Such a man's knowledge, in other words, is worth something; it does have value in itself and it may lead certain auditors to the ideal combination of good thinking and good deeds. For the failure of the *mercenarius* is not one of knowledge; that is the

sin characteristic of the heretic. Therefore, these types of teacher should not be put on a par. In spirit, here Henry was following Philippians 1:18 by affirming the supreme importance of proclaiming Christ.

Whatever the truth of that specific matter may be, it should by now be abundantly clear that segregation of the *officium praedicatoris* from the character of the man who assumes that office is a crucial and consistent feature of the discussions reviewed above. The emphasis was thereby placed, as Jean Leclercq says, on the dignity of the function and on the obligation of the person to act in accordance with it. Concomitant with this was the clear recognition that some actual preachers lamentably fail to live up to their high calling. And here the intellectual machinery ground to a halt. The cogs and springs of Aristotelian psychology (particularly the theory of *habitus*) and of Aristotelian causality (particularly the theory of instrumental causality) served to bring out the full proportions of the problem but did not produce a solution. Indeed, given the very nature of the problem and the methods of analysis then available, no abstract solution was possible. A rationale could easily be provided for the sinful lecturer instructing his audience in a specific science, but the spectacle of a sinful preacher attempting to preach to his flock was far more problematic. Here the special circumstances had to be investigated: scandal was to be avoided at all costs, the spiritual welfare of the flock being the primary consideration. At which point the problem became a practical one. If the preacher was doing more harm than good in his preaching, then it was up to his bishop or other superior to intervene and silence him. According to the Lollards of late-medieval England, however, the level of ecclesiastical control and policing of preaching was utterly inadequate, and in tacit opposition to attempts to allow some (albeit limited) value to certain kinds of deviant preacher, they produced an ideology whereby the lack of personal righteousness disqualified a sinner from preaching and destroyed his pedagogic authority. Those issues will be addressed later; for the moment our concern is with the transmission of orthodox doctrine concerning good and bad preachers.

Theory into Practice: Codes of Conduct in Preachers' Handbooks

The preacher's appropriate codes of conduct and *conditiones*, as defined in (largely Parisian) scholastic debate, constituted discourses which exercised considerable influence and enjoyed wide dissemination, appearing in various forms in many preachers' aids and reference books, including the *artes praedicandi* and *exempla* collections.⁵⁴ The genre of *ars praedicandi* flourished particularly in England, and such works as Thomas of Chobham's ambitiously

pioneering *Summa de arte praedicandi*, Robert of Basevorn's *Forma praedicandi* (1322), Thomas Waleys's *De modo componendi sermones* (c. 1338) and Ralph Higden's *Ars componendi sermones* (c. 1340) include treatments of the three types of issue which have been defined above, concerning authority, knowledge, and personal character.⁵⁵ "Three things are necessary for the one exercising an act of preaching," said Robert of Basevorn—and here we return to the quotation with which the present chapter began. The *tria necessaria* are defined as purity of life, competent knowledge, and authority. With regard to the last of these, Robert emphasizes the importance of having the preacher properly licensed, by either a bishop or the pope. The preacher must be "sent out" with the proper authority, by the Church. As St. Paul asks, "How will they preach, unless they be sent?" (Romans 10:15). Wherefore we learn that "No lay person or Religious, unless permitted (*licentiatu*s) by a Bishop or the Pope, and no woman, no matter how learned or saintly (*docta et sancta*), ought to preach. Nor is it enough for one to say that he was commissioned by God (*a Deo missus*), unless he clearly proves this, for the heretics are wont to make this claim."⁵⁶ In Chapter 3 below we will consider the extent to which one group of "heretics," the Lollards, made just such a claim, and also the manner in which some of them questioned the received wisdom that "no woman, no matter how learned or saintly, ought to preach."

The second thing which Robert of Basevorn deems necessary for one engaged in the act of preaching is—predictably enough—competent knowledge (*scientia*). The preacher "must at least have explicit knowledge of the articles of Faith, the Ten Commandments, and the distinction between sin and non-sin; otherwise, 'the blind leads the blind, and both fall into the ditch'" (cf. Matthew 15:14; Luke 6:39). However, Robert spends more time on the first of his requirements, purity of life, where he defers to the opinion of the *doctores*, which I take to be a specific reference to debates of the kind discussed above as opposed to a vague general remark.⁵⁷ What we are offered is an elaboration of the distinction (as found in Thomas of Chobham's *Summa de arte praedicandi*) between the teacher who can discharge his duty while in a state of mortal sin and the preacher who cannot. It is necessary to have "purity of life, without remorse of conscience with respect to anything grievous; otherwise, according to the doctors, the preacher sins grievously." For God demands of the sinner, "Why dost thou announce my justice?" adding that He "will accuse you and stand against your face" (Psalm 49:16, 21).

The necessity for *puritas vitae* in the preacher, Robert explains, is because he has taken upon himself an *officium* whose end (*finis*) in itself is to make others good. "In this there is a great, indeed a very great, presumption that he is initiated into hierarchical acts, yes

divine acts”; he publicly show himself to be, as it were, divine and godlike, although—in the case in which he is a sinner—he is actually deformed. Now, a person may say that he is good when he is not, and this may not be a mortal sin, because he is not engaged in a hierarchical act. Robert proceeds to contrast the very different objectives of the *lector* and the *predicator*:

Thus a lecturer in a school (*lector in scholia*) may be in mortal sin and teach in it, and because his act of itself is not immediately directed to making others good as such I do not believe that he sins mortally [i.e., in his act of teaching.]⁵⁸

Robert concludes that we must say concerning the immoral preacher exactly what we would say concerning the immoral priest who is obliged to administer a sacrament:

But as it seems to me, we must say on this subject [i.e., of the immoral preacher] what we would say about one administering some sacrament in mortal sin, that if he can refuse ministering it without confusion, scandal, or ultimate danger to him to whom the sacrament ought to be administered, by all means he ought to do so; otherwise he commits a new mortal sin. If he cannot refuse, he ought to be sincerely contrite, and in that case the saying applies: “I said: I will confess, and you forgave” (Psalm 31:5). Thus refraining for the most part from that sin, he can administer the sacrament. This is what I believe should be said here.

Sic credo hic esse dicendum. So did most others. Here is one area in which there was little debate, Robert’s predecessors and contemporaries being confident about drawing parallels between the situation of the immoral preacher and that of the immoral minister of one or more of the sacraments (while, of course, recognizing that preaching was not itself a sacrament, but rather one of the duties consequent on the sacrament of ordination). On certain occasions certain aspects of the *conditiones praedicatoris* may look like a subsection within the larger discussion; on others, they seem to be fuelling debate on different but related issues. Often it is intellectually difficult if not impossible—and indeed fatuous—to try to determine which argument inspired which other. For one and the same argument could function as both producer and product, instigator and instigated.

What is abundantly clear is that many of the arguments concerning the relationship between institutionally conferred authority and personal righteousness that have become familiar during the preceding discussion also feature crucially in accounts of the valid administration of the sacraments. In order to pursue this line of inquiry our analysis must go beyond the specific dilemmas concerning the immoral preacher to trace the larger parameters of sacerdotal office, within which the ideals and deviancies of preaching were constructed—and, furthermore, to bring into play the controversial theology of indulgences, or “pardons” as they were known *vulgariter*,

which are the main stock-in-trade of that “noble ecclesiaste,” Chaucer’s Pardoner.

II. CONSECRATING THE SACRAMENTS: PRIESTLY POWER AND THE KEYS TO HEAVEN

The “sacrament of the altar” was deemed to be of the first importance for the Christian faith, and hence its ministers were subjected to close scholastic scrutiny. Thomas Aquinas explains that “in an absolute sense” (*simpliciter loquendo*) the Eucharist is the greatest of all the sacraments,⁵⁹ and priests are consecrated in order that the *corpus Christi* may be “confectured” (the Latin verb *conficere* being regularly used in this context).⁶⁰ “Take away this Sacrament from the Church,” exclaims Bonaventure, “and what is left in the world besides error and unbelief? The Christian people would be scattered like a herd of swine and given to idolatry. . . . Instead, by the presence of this Sacrament, the Church stands firm, faith is strengthened, the Christian religion and divine worship are kept alive.”⁶¹

Little wonder, then, that concerns about priests who were aberrant in one way or another (because they were known fornicators, heretics, schismatics, excommunicates, or whatever) came into sharp focus in discussion of the minister who confected the sacrament of the altar and of the correct manner of its ministration. From our point of view, therefore, this body of doctrine affords a crucial means of placing the specific responsibilities of the preacher within the cultural construction of clerical privilege and prerogative in general. Here is a controversial site on which all the major academic theologians of the later Middle Ages worked out their rationalizations of the power of the priesthood and sought to consolidate their control over Christian belief. The ideological structure they built seems solid and secure. But it had weak spots—soon to be put under extreme pressure by the arguments of John Wyclif and the followers who often transformed rather than merely transmitted his thought *in vulgari*. More foundationally, Peter Lombard himself, the Master of the *Sentences*, had raised but failed to resolve a burning issue, which was to trouble generation after generation of his commentators, concerning the limits of the sacerdotal capacity for confection and the point at which it may cease to exist.

Sin versus Sacrament: Evil Ministers of the Mass

The highly influential *Summa theologiae* which was begun by Alexander of Hales O.F.M. and completed by others after his death in 1245 provides an excellent point of departure, given the popularity of it

enjoyed and the fact that Alexander was the schoolman who inaugurated at Paris the tradition of lecturing on Peter Lombard's *Sentences*.⁶² In this *Summa* the question is posed, can a priest who lives an evil life consecrate the Eucharist? It would seem so, according to Augustine: "Within the Catholic Church, in the mystery of the Lord's body and blood, nothing greater is done by a good priest, nothing less is done by a bad priest." In fact, these words are not Augustine's, but he had said identical things in his writings against the Donatists,⁶³ though there the crucial sacrament was baptism—its universal validity and integrity, the fact that people baptized by members of the Donatist sect did not have to be re-baptized when they came within, or returned to, the fold of orthodox Christianity. Peter Lombard alleges this *auctoritas* in his defense of the Eucharist confected by the evil minister; its strong anti-Donatist message ensured it would be reiterated again and again in scholastic discussions of all kinds of aberrant priest.⁶⁴ "Donatism" is not, it should be noted, the lead concept or banner headline in such discussion; the situation is rather that issues which originated (or at least received full attention) in that ancient controversy were recuperated and redeployed within the scheme of a textbook which became essential reading for every trainee theologian. No matter what the usage of the term may have been, the relevant arguments were very well known.

For the moment let us stay with the *Alexandri summa* and some of the "contrary opinions" it sets against the proposition that the deviant priest can consecrate the Eucharist. If God confers his benefits on the worthy, there seems no reason to doubt that He withdraws them from the unworthy (Leviticus 26 and Deuteronomy 28 are brought in as supporting evidence); furthermore, anyone who misuses power deserves to lose it, and this principle applies to both divine and human law. The *Summa*'s response is that a bad priest has the *potestas conficiendi* as much as a good one, (pseudo-) Augustine being quoted at more length: "it is not by the merits of the consecrator that the sacrament is wrought, but by the Creator's word and the power of the Holy Spirit." But, is not a bad priest improperly disposed under his Lord God, and thus not functioning with the necessary divine power? This objection is dismissed with the statement that even though such a man is deficient in goodness of life, nevertheless he is properly disposed by dint of holy orders and office. Whatever he lacks, Christ will supply.

Thomas Aquinas takes the same line, emphasizing that "the priest consecrates this sacrament, not by his own powers, but as Christ's minister in whose person he acts."⁶⁵ One does not cease to be Christ's minister because one is wicked, "for the Lord has good and bad ministers as servants." The fact that "a man may be Christ's minister

even though he be not righteous” is deemed to be “part of Christ’s greatness”; He receives service from both good and bad, since by His providence all such actions “are to His glory.” Of course, persons who are blemished should not approach the altar. But “this does not prevent them from offering a true sacrifice if they do.” But what, then, may be said concerning Malachi 2:2, “I will curse your blessings”? (This is an *auctoritas* of crucial importance in scholastic confrontation of the evil minister and the consequences of his actions, to which we shall be returning again and again.)⁶⁶ And the view of Dionysius the Areopagite that the words uttered by one who has fallen away from the priestly order cannot rightly be called prayers? Aquinas’s answer is that “the blessing of a sinful priest inasmuch as he acts unworthily is deserving of a curse,” and is reputed a blasphemy rather than a prayer, “yet inasmuch as it is pronounced in the person of Christ it is holy and effective for salvation.” The crucial point, then, is that valid consecration of the Eucharist is not dependent on the life (whether good or bad) of the celebrant but rather on divine power and authority, the requisite amount and type of which is conferred on the priest at his ordination.⁶⁷ In sum, an admirably succinct refutation of the fundamentals of Donatism.

To be sure, the evil-living priest who dares to consecrate while in a state of mortal sin brings down the divine wrath upon his own head. This is made abundantly clear in Bonaventure’s *Tractatus de praeparatione ad missam*. “It is a fearful thing to fall into the hands of the living God” (Hebrews 10:31), which is what happens to those who approach the altar without due contrition, a firm intention to amend, and proper confession of sins.⁶⁸ “Alas, how many today are those wretched priests who, unmindful of their salvation, partake of the Body of Christ at the altar as if they were eating the flesh of a mere animal; and who, entangled and contaminated by abominations—which it would be indecent to mention—are not afraid of touching and kissing with their criminal hands and their polluted lips the Son of God and of the Virgin Mary!”⁶⁹ Even worse is the fact that “in our days” some priests have reached “such utter perversion and irrationality (*perversitatem et stultitiam*)” as to imagine that their “crimes and impure sins, which they repeat every day and intend to repeat,” will be expiated, without penance or confession having been performed, by the mere fact of their daily celebration of the Holy Eucharist. Cleanliness of mind must be assured—and also of body. Here Bonaventure has in mind not only “willful impurity, which is a mortal sin, but also any nocturnal or accidental stain,” which is definitely a possible impediment to the celebration of Mass if one is celebrating voluntarily, i.e., if the priest had the option of excusing himself from approaching the altar, there being no “grave necessity or

binding command” to necessitate and justify his involvement. However, if the nocturnal emission was genuinely accidental, and not the result of “previous impure desires or excessive drinking,” then it may be said that “the soul is not seriously befouled by the memory and imagination of carnal dreams.”⁷⁰ But there is no ambiguity about what awaits the individual who is guilty of some impurity in his soul or flesh: “Out of sheer disgust, Christ vomits such a man, and expels him as an evil-smelling corpse to be devoured by wild beasts and birds of prey. He abandons this unfruitful soul to the devil’s tortures . . .”⁷¹

None of this, however, is the recipient’s problem.⁷² No matter how much the wicked celebrant has incurred the divine wrath, there is no question whatever of the validity of his sacrament in itself. This point is made abundantly clear in a host of *quaestiones*, the discussions of Albert the Great (c. 1200–1280), Bonaventure, and Aquinas being among the most cogent.⁷³ Is the mass of a bad priest worth less than the mass of a good priest? Albert and Bonaventure cite (pseudo-) Augustine’s anti-Donatist statement that in confecting the Eucharist, “nothing greater is done by a good priest, nothing less is done by a bad priest” (cf. p. 55 above). Bonaventure adds that if one priest’s mass is said to be better than another’s, this would give some men the impression that they had, so to speak, a better deal than other people, which would be *inconveniens*—an inappropriate and unfitting idea. Both theologians firmly distinguish between the substantial and the additional aspects of the mass. In respect to the former, that being the confection of the body and blood of Christ, there is utter uniformity and equity between priests. In respect to the latter, the work of man rather than of God (as Albert puts it), there is inequality—and from *that* point of view the mass of the good priest may be regarded as better.⁷⁴ Those additional aspects or “adjuncts” which can admit of inequality include such things as petitions, prayers, obsecrations, and the manner of devotion and devout affection. The Mass of a good priest is more stimulating in the arousal of devotion.⁷⁵ Albert emphasizes that in no way does he wish to censure anyone for preferring to hear the good priest’s Mass, because “frequently the bad man irreverently treats the body of Christ”—for example, by covering it with a dirty cloth or leaving it unattended on the altar. Similarly, Bonaventure remarks that “if a person more willingly hears the mass of the more devout priest, I believe that he acts well, providing he believes that, as far as the substantial aspect is concerned, this priest does not far exceed the sinner; otherwise he [that person] would err perilously.”⁷⁶

Aquinas also addresses the issue of the quality of priestly prayer,⁷⁷ citing the *Decretum* as stating that “the worthier the priest the more readily is he heard in the needs for which he prays.” The authority of

Augustine would seem to go against this, he notes, inasmuch as the saint says that “the wickedness of ministers cannot redound to Christ’s mysteries.”⁷⁸ In resolving this apparent contradiction, Aquinas contrasts the sacrament itself with “the prayers offered therein for the living and the dead.” As far as the sacrament is concerned, “the mass of a bad priest is worth no less than the mass of a good priest, for by both the same sacrament is wrought.” In this case, an individual’s “private evil” (*malum privatum*) cannot harm anyone else. As far as the prayers are concerned, however, a further distinction must be made. “In so far as they have efficacy from the devotion of the priest who prays” then there is no doubt that the prayers of a better priest are more fruitful. But, “in so far as they are said in the person of the whole Church, of which the priest is the minister,” it must be said that “the prayers even of a sinful priest are fruitful” and this includes not only the prayers of the mass but also the other prayers he says while performing his ecclesiastical office. In contrast, his “private” prayers are not fruitful.⁷⁹

The level of consensus here reached concerning the substance of the mass and the *adjuncta* of personal prayers is striking, the standards and methodologies of analysis remarkably uniform. And yet: in the event it did not take much pressure to reveal the cracks in the edifice. By way of example, we may consider the Lollard treatise *De precationis sacris*—not from an extreme wing of Wycliffite thought, by any means, but thus all the more indicative of how relatively small conceptual shifts could produce quite strikingly different—and threatening—results.⁸⁰ The prayers of the wicked are here said to be an abomination to the Lord (cf. Isaiah 1:10); indeed, “preire wiþouten goode dede is nouȝt.”⁸¹ Therefore when a priest who is “out of good lif and charite” dares to say mass, “he etip and drynkiþ his owen dampnacion.” That is perfectly orthodox, as is the idea that “a cursed man doþ fully þe sacramentis, þouȝ it be to his dampnyng, for þei ben not autours [authors] of þes sacramentis, but God kepith þat dygnyte to hymself.”⁸² The anonymous writer, however, angrily attacks the suggestion that this same valorization might apply to the prayers of wicked priests: “þe fend techiþ a newe glose, to seie þat þouȝ men ben not worþi to be herd in preisyng for here owene good lif, ȝit here preiere is herd in merit of holy Chirche, for þey ben procuratours of þe Chirche. Certis þis is a foul soffyme [sophism], a foul and a sotil discet [deceit] of Anticristis clerkes, to coloure here synne þerbi.” The implication here is that such “discet” makes the evil priest utterly untrustworthy, not a fit guide for those people who seek “a trewe servaunt of God, and clene of lif, and devout, to helpe hem aȝenst here synnis and combraunce of þe fend.”

The author of *De precationis sacris* quotes canon law copiously to

make the point that no-one should hear the mass of a priest who publicly and “wipouten ony doute” keeps a concubine. Such evil individuals must not “entre into holy Chirche, and seie masse”—but if they presume to do so, their congregations “schullen not here her service.”⁸³ The strident totalizing of such statements opens up the prospect of layfolk boycotting church services if they do not approve of the ministers who are officiating at them—a far cry from the restrained manner in which, for example, Thomas Aquinas tackled the question, “is it lawful to receive communion from or assist at masses of heretical, schismatic, or sinful priests?”⁸⁴ Here Augustine is quoted as saying, “one should not shun God’s sacrament be the man good or bad.”⁸⁵ After all, sinners, heretics, and excommunicates seem to have the power to effect a valid sacrament. Is this true also, Aquinas then asks, of the priest who is a fornicator? On the one hand, it is not forbidden to hear the masses of priests who have sinned in far worse ways—so why should the fornicator be singled out for rejection? On the other, according to canon law a man should not hear the mass of a priest “whom he knows beyond doubt keeps a concubine.”⁸⁶ In resolving the problem, Aquinas affirms that, while all these kinds of sinful priests do have the power of consecrating the Eucharist, they do not *rightly* exercise it, and sin in so doing.⁸⁷ If the Church has specifically debarred them from performing such a priestly function, then no-one should participate in it, whether as assistant or recipient—otherwise they commit sin. Until such times as the Church’s sentence is pronounced, however, it is quite lawful to receive communion from them and assist at their mass. What, then, of the fornicator in particular? There are indeed worse sins than fornication, yet men are more prone to it “owing to the lusts of the flesh. Consequently this sin is particularly forbidden to priests by the Church, lest anyone assist at the mass of one living in concubinage.” But Aquinas is anxious to point out that “this is to be understood of one who is notorious (*notorio*), either from being convicted and sentenced, or ‘by an acknowledgement of guilt in judicial form, or by plain evidence of the facts from which he cannot shuffle away.’”⁸⁸

His teacher Albert the Great had stated that no-one should hear the mass of a deviant priest (whether a heretic, simoniac, or schismatic) who was *notorious*—here defined as one who had admitted his guilt in the presence of a judge or had it legally proved by a witness.⁸⁹ And, if a person hears such a deviant’s mass with full knowledge of his deviancy, then that person sins mortally; if this is done in ignorance, of course, a more lenient view may be taken. Concerning the fornicator, Albert continues, the same distinction between what is “notorious” and what is “secret” (*occultus*) applies; an individual who is infamous for his vice should have the full rigor of the law applied to

him, and following his trial, his mass should not be heard. Before such a sentence is passed, however, the fornicator-priest may be listened to—and anyone who does not do so is a *contumax*, an obstinate or unyielding person. A high standard of proof is here being applied. And the judgment of such deviants rests with the ecclesiastical authorities; congregations cannot, so to speak, take the law into their own hands.

Again, apparently a seamless web of orthodox consensus on a controversial issue. Behind this, however, lay an embarrassing fact. Peter Lombard had sharply distinguished between fornicator priests and those who were heretics and excommunicates, apparently believing that members of the latter group were unable to confect the Eucharist: “Indeed, those who are excommunicated, or manifestly designated as heretics, do not appear to be able to confect this sacrament, even though they are priests.”⁹⁰ If he thought otherwise, as some apologists have suggested, then all one can say is that he made a thoroughly bad job of expressing his personal opinion. What happens in the relevant passage in the *Sentences* is, in my view, due to Peter’s (perfectly understandable) desire to deny the validity of sacraments performed outside the Church. Hence he makes great play with the Lord’s statement as reported at Malachi 2:2, “I will curse your blessings”: if the blessings of such deviants are cursed, how much more so is their host!⁹¹ (There is a major irony in the fact that this doctrine is attributed—quite falsely—to St. Augustine, the theologian who had done so much to accommodate the sacrament of baptism as conferred by one particular group of heretics, the Donatists.) Thus the Lombard left a legacy of toil and trouble for the legions of students who were obliged to comment on his *Sentences* as part of their theological training. Albert the Great tackled the problem with typical directness. “The Master says this falsely in his text,” he declares; “the Master is not to be supported.”⁹² “The divine sacraments require in their maker” only *ordo* and *intentio*—that is, the holy orders whereby one is a Christian minister and the correct intention or genuine objective of making the sacrament in question. And *that* is the truth of the matter, Albert asserts. Certain doctors may hold the view that heretics, schismatics, simoniacs, or open fornicators cannot confect the Eucharist, but they are simply wrong (“simpliciter falsum est quod dicunt . . .”).

Albert does soften his stance somewhat in proceeding to suggest that the Lombard may be supported if it is assumed that he is talking of heretics and people living outside the Church who do not follow the Christian manner and rite of celebrating the sacraments. However, to be on the safe side Albert devotes a (short) *quaestio* specifically to the meaning of Malachi 2:2, “Maledicam benedictionibus vestris.”⁹³ That word *vestris* proves crucial—it is plural and therefore must refer to

the blessings of mere mortals rather than to the sacraments of the singular God. *En passant* Albert asks, which of two equally evil priests sins the worse, the one who celebrates with full knowledge of his mortal sin, or the other who, terrified, only pretends to celebrate?⁹⁴ His answer is that it is the first, because he has contempt for the sacrament and, insofar as he has the power to do so, defiles it.

Such underlying controversy may help us to understand why the distinction between sin which is known or “notorious” and sin which is secret⁹⁵—a distinction which, as we have seen, appeared frequently in discussion of the *officium praedicatoris*—has in this case hardened into a matter of public legal pronouncements, of sentences duly passed by a church court, which bar a priest from carrying out some or all of the duties of his office. Indeed, it is remarkable how often the same arguments, with the same discourses pro and contra, appear and reappear in the Lombard-commentators’ discussion of various aspects of priestly power and responsibilities, as the Donatist threat (if we may be permitted this shorthand phrase) is addressed and averted. In particular, the methods of analyzing and resolving difficulties which are characteristic of discussions of the confection of the Eucharist (as reviewed above) are often paralleled in discussions concerning the ministration of baptism. This is hardly surprising, given that the Lombard had provided parallel discussions of the deviant minister of the Eucharist (with the schismatic or heretical priest being left problematic) and the deviant minister of baptism (with the universal validity of this sacrament being defended, in terms which recall, and sometimes actually draw upon, Augustine’s anti-Donatist writings).

Furthermore, given that these sacraments vied with each other in terms of order of importance, much effort was put into their complementary definition. Thomas Aquinas summed up the matter neatly by explaining that in absolute terms, the sacrament of the Eucharist is the greatest, but if viewed from the point of view of necessity (*ex parte necessitatis*), it must be said that baptism is the most important.⁹⁶ “Baptism is necessary absolutely and unconditionally”;⁹⁷ no-one can be saved without it, and hence if a priest is not present, the task may be delegated to others. Indeed, in extreme situations—as when, for example, a newborn child is at the point of death—it can be conferred by a layman, indeed by a lay woman (an *old woman*, they often say), or even by a heretic, a schismatic, or a non-Christian. In this special circumstance any water will do; it does not have to be holy water. But the proper form of words is essential—of far greater importance than who says them. The power to baptize, then, was conferred very widely, in marked contrast to the power of confection and the power of absolution within the tribunal of penance. And this was justified by its special, indeed unique, importance.

In bringing out that special importance, the Parisian dominican Peter of Tarantasia (who was elected Pope Innocent V shortly before his death in 1276)⁹⁸ asked questions of a form familiar to us from our discussion of the sacrament of the altar: can baptism be conferred by evil ministers?⁹⁹ and, may a better baptism be had from a better minister?¹⁰⁰ In part adapting materials which Aquinas had used in his more general *quaestio*, “can the sacraments be conferred by evil ministers?”¹⁰¹ Peter puts forward these opinions: a bad man is not a fit minister of the sacrament of baptism, a dead member does not serve others as an effective channel, and no-one can serve two masters (cf. Matthew 6:24), the devil and Christ together. Hence an evil minister cannot confer baptism. On the other hand, Peter continues, Augustine says that baptism may be given by a man who is a drunkard, a murderer, given to whatever evil (this actually follows Peter Lombard’s review of the problem). And it is held that *in extremis* baptism can be conferred by a Jew, a pagan, or a heretic: therefore it can be conferred by any type of sinner.

Peter’s *responsio* explains that certain things pertain to the substance of the sacrament while others pertain to propriety, i.e., the behavior which is appropriate for its conferral. If substantial things are lacking, the sacrament is not valid; if things relating to propriety are lacking, the sacrament is unaffected. Furthermore, in time of necessity probity is relatively unimportant, and as far as the “dead member” is concerned, the influx involved is not internal (relating to the person’s own spiritual situation) but external, as coming from God. Besides, in certain actions to be a servant of the devil is to serve God, or to be his minister. But does an evil minister really confer an effective sacrament? Ecclesiasticus 34:4 rightly asks, “who can be made clean by the unclean?” An evil minister is not an effective mediator; and nothing can give what it hasn’t got itself. Against all this, however, is the argument that water may be conducted to the plains by a stone channel;¹⁰² similarly, grace may be conveyed by a bad minister to the recipients of the sacrament. Furthermore, an individual’s salvation should not be dependent on the life of someone else. And a doctor who has a corporeal infirmity is nevertheless able to cure someone else corporeally; the same is true of the spiritual doctor, who effects spiritual healing.

Can a better baptism be had from a better minister? After all, the better the agent the better the action. A multiplicity of causes results in a multiplicity of effects; when a holy man baptizes, the cause of grace is multiplied and therefore the effect is multiplied, and should not one desire as many good effects as possible? Furthermore, whoever is more enlightened is better able to enlighten others, and

the more learned person is better able to teach others. However, as Augustine says, a better person does not give better baptism. This actually follows Peter Lombard's own statement, "Nec melior est baptismus qui per meliorem datur," which the Lombard had backed up with a summary of part of Augustine's fifth tractate on the Gospel of John.¹⁰³ Furthermore, Peter of Tarantasia continues, a good minister does not dispense better alms than a bad one. And, if the evil of a bad minister doesn't diminish the effect of his baptism, therefore the goodness of a good one doesn't augment the goodness of his. Peter's utterly predictable answer is that in substantial matters the operation of a good minister isn't of greater value than a good one, because God here operates as *auctor*, and the man as mere minister.

Peter then moves on to ask if baptism can be given by those who do not have holy orders, whether lay people or angels.¹⁰⁴ His *responsio* brings out the fact that baptism is the sacrament of maximum necessity, because neither children nor adults may be saved without it. *In extremis* any kind of water suffices for baptism, and any man can give it. Indeed, Peter had said a little earlier that in the case of necessity even an old woman (*vetula*) can perform an efficacious baptism.¹⁰⁵ That view was commonplace. Albert the Great, for instance, had affirmed that "When an old woman baptizes, the baptism actually does take place" (*vetula baptizat, et baptizatum est*), emphasizing that *in casu necessitatis* the person performing this rite does not have to be of the masculine sex, have holy orders or jurisdiction, or be living a good life.¹⁰⁶ However, no-one actually recommended this course of action, or thought for a moment that it should be the norm. Ideally, an ordained minister should do the deed, just as proper holy water should be used, as Peter of Tarantasia (typically) emphasizes. He sums up by saying that the bestowal of baptism may be justified on two grounds: either with reference to authoritative office, which applies solely to a priest, or *ex iuris permissione* (i.e., in accordance with what is legally permitted), which applies to others, chiefly in case of necessity. But what about angels? They cannot baptize or consecrate *ex officio*, Peter explains, but only by special divine mandate. And, the angel in question must be a good one— in this very special case, it would seem, individual goodness does matter after all.

As far as lay people are concerned, however, personal virtue or vice is irrelevant in the emergency conferral of baptism. The schoolmen are utterly unanimous on that point, and there is little variation in how the issue is handled.¹⁰⁷ However, Thomas Aquinas isolates and treats separately the specific question, can a woman baptize?¹⁰⁸ He begins by quoting the Council of Carthage's prohibition: "A woman, no matter how learned and holy, should not

presume to teach men in public assembly or to baptize others.”¹⁰⁹ Given that it is perfectly clear that women cannot teach publicly (it being “shameful for a woman to speak in church”; I Corinthians 14:35), it would seem that they cannot baptize either. Moreover, baptism belongs to the prelatical office (the *officium praelationis*), and thus should be dispensed by priests who have the cure of souls. Because women cannot hold this office (“I permit no woman to teach or to have authority over men”; I Timothy 2:12), they lack the authority to baptize. Aquinas then embarks on a somewhat bizarre excursus. In the spiritual rebirth of baptism “water seems to take the place of the maternal womb.” But the person who baptizes “seems rather to have the task of father (*patris officium*)”: this is not fitting for a woman, and therefore a woman cannot baptize. This assertion is set up only to be knocked down, of course, but its deficiency as an argument is particularly glaring: a woman’s material possession of a womb means that a body-metaphor relating to spiritual matters works against her, destroying her case to be allowed to baptize.

Not one of Aquinas’s better moments. Still, he does invoke the contrast between the material and the spiritual in his response. In human generation, male and female function in accordance with their different natures, the male being active and the female passive. “So a woman cannot be the active principle of generation but the passive only.” But in spiritual generation people work not by their own powers but as instruments of the power of Christ, and therefore both men and women can baptize *in casu necessitatis*. One might interrogate this position further, and ask, if in certain spiritual matters men and women operate not in accordance with their different and distinctive natures but as the equal instruments of a higher agency, is there not a basis here for treating male and female equally in respect of their right to preach and indeed to confect the Eucharist?

But of course Aquinas does not go down that route; for that sort of argument we will have to await the Lollard theology of Walter Brut and John Purvey (as discussed in Chapter 3 below). What Aquinas does say here is that a woman, although not permitted to teach publicly (*publice docere*), can nevertheless “instruct and admonish privately” (*potest tamen privata doctrina vel monitione aliquem instruere*): on the same argument, while she may not baptize publicly and solemnly she can baptize “in case of necessity.” For the purposes of this argument, then, baptism *in necessitate* is put on a par with private teaching. And the emphasis is very much on what is permissible in the most extreme of circumstances. If there is a capable layman present, then he should perform the baptism rather than a woman; if there is a cleric present the layman should defer to him; and of course if an ordained priest is available, he must do the job. Aquinas cites I

Corinthians 11:3 in justification: “the head of a woman is man and the head of man is Christ.” So, if and only if there is no supposedly superior individual available, should a woman act. The rigidity of this hierarchical system somewhat undermines the apparent inclusiveness of the *auctoritates* with which Aquinas had started his *responsio*. There it had been affirmed that Christ principally baptizes, so the person of whatever sex “on whom you see the spirit descend and remain” (John 1:33) can perform the physical action, particularly in view of the fact that “in Christ there is neither male nor female” (Galatians 3:28). The force of that Galatians passage was further circumscribed and muted when orthodox theologians came to ponder the question of whether women can preach, as we shall see.

Indeed, many of the thirteenth-century *quaestiones* on the proper ministry of the sacraments have a curiously prophetic quality—they indicate the shape of things to come in late-medieval England. This need not surprise us, given that the Church had considerable experience of dealing with earlier versions of heresies espoused by Wyclif and his followers, within Catharism and Waldensianism.¹¹⁰ Certain “contrary opinions” which were canvassed in the course of the affirmation of orthodoxy, allowed a brief span of life within the firmly controlled thought structure of the *quaestio*, were to return to haunt the establishment. Excellent examples are afforded by discussions of the relationship between the sacraments of baptism and the Eucharist included in the *Alexandri summa*¹¹¹ and Bonaventure’s *Sentences* commentary,¹¹² particularly since both address the issue of the moral goodness of the person administering the sacraments, whether priest or layman. The *Alexandri summa* lists *inter alia* the following arguments against the proposition that priests alone can confect the Eucharist. The works of a man who is just and good are pleasing to God, so why can’t he consecrate? Also, the sinner loses all dignity, and if such dignity is necessary for consecration, then surely the just layman possesses the *potestas consecrandi*? If the unjust priest is said to have this power, does not the just layman have it to an even greater extent? Then there is the telling parallel with the sacrament of baptism. Priests are given this power *ex officio*, yet nevertheless if a lay person baptizes, the sacrament is efficacious. Although priests have the power of baptizing, laymen can do it also: so, the same argument would seem to apply to the consecration of the Eucharist. Since the power of baptizing is widely granted, so also should be the power of consecration. At I Peter 2:9 God says to all just men, “you are a chosen race, a royal priesthood”; it follows that priestly privilege belongs to all just men, and hence they can consecrate.¹¹³

Naturally, the *Alexandri summa* gives these arguments short shrift. Unjust priests do possess the *potestas consecrandi*: after all, the works

of the unjust may actually may be pleasing to God, as when they afflict those who have turned away from Him. Then again, while it's true that whatever the just man does is pleasing to God, his justice does not enable him to consecrate—holy orders are required. Concerning dignity, it may be said there are two kinds: dignity of merit and dignity of office or authority. If a priest lacks the dignity of personal merit he does nevertheless possess the dignity of office and authority; on the contrary, the just layman lacks the dignity of office and authority though he enjoys the dignity of merit. But the power of consecrating depends on the power of authority and not on the power of personal merit, and hence the just layman cannot consecrate. What, then, of the analogy with baptism? The answer is that this is a quite different case. Baptism is a *sacramentum necessitatis*, and thus, although the office of baptizing is given spiritually to priests, it is conceded to everyone in time of need. The *Alexandri summa* is unequivocal in its affirmation that the power of consecrating belongs to priests alone, because it is related to sacerdotal orders. This is the teaching of the church, as transmitted by the Apostles who were instructed by Christ Himself, and anyone who asserts otherwise is deviating from the truth of the faith.

In similar vein, Bonaventure claims that this is a matter of faith, as received from the Apostles and from the Lord Himself. The sacrament of the altar is held in great reverence and hence only specially commissioned persons may legally dispense it. Such a commission rests on one of two possible bases, sanctity or authority. Heretics (obviously Bonaventure has Donatists in mind here) say it depends on sanctity. But that raises a major difficulty: in the case of a bad priest's mass one could not be sure if the Eucharist was certainly made, and our salvation would be dependent on the goodness of another. However, if the commission rests on authority, and of course Bonaventure believes that this is the case, it is evident that authority can be granted to the bad as well as the good—*auctoritas potest tam bonis quam malis concedi*. Both bad and good priests possess the authority of holy orders, and hence both can confect the Eucharist.

But if a lay person can baptize, why can't he confect? Bonaventure's predictable answer is that unlike things are being compared here, because baptism is the primary sacrament, and necessary for salvation, and not held in such veneration as is the sacrament of the altar. He had given space to the contrary opinion that "The good layman is more worthy to be a minister of God than the impious priest": *magis dignus est ministrare Deo bonus laicus quam impius sacerdos*. If at the invocation of a bad priest God converts bread into body, surely this is done far more securely on the word of a good layman? This argument is rejected on the grounds that individual

goodness is not crucial for the power of consecrating, whereas authority is—and priests possess such authority by reason of the *character* (an imprint, mark, or stamp) which they receive at ordination.

At least some of Wyclif's followers were *not* willing to accept that the argument from *character* resolved all the problems attendant on conceding authority to good and bad alike, suspecting that what was at stake was indeed a matter of personal sanctity. Some went so far as to claim that the virtue of the Eucharist was in some way related to the virtue of the priest who had confected it, a potentially Donatist viewpoint which some of Wyclif's own (rather more subtle) remarks in *De Eucharistia* could easily have been taken as supporting.¹¹⁴ A related Lollard view was that the works of a righteous layman are worth a lot more than those of the bad priest; indeed, just men are *ipso facto* a chosen race, members of the royal priesthood (to adopt the idiom of I Peter 2:9). In such arguments, the fact that baptism can be conferred by a lay person, whether male or female (albeit *in necessitate*), is seen as a weak link in the orthodox theologians' case, insofar as it opens up the possibility of people other than officially ordained priests having sacramental power and authority.¹¹⁵ Clearly, the comparison between the sacrament of the altar and baptism was troubling inasmuch as it raised the specter of the legality of lay ministry of all the sacraments. But the theologians had two powerful weapons in their armory, namely, the doctrines of the priestly *character* and the power of the keys.

What exactly made a priest so special? At ordination he received an imprint or *character* which indicated that he was marked off to perform certain spiritual functions. "It has been customary," Aquinas explains, "that whenever anyone is deputed to some definite function he is marked off for it by means of some sign." Thus "in ancient times" soldiers on enlistment for military service were "marked with some form of physical 'character' in recognition of the fact that they were deputed for some function in the physical sphere. In the same way, therefore, when in the sacraments men are deputed for some function in the spiritual sphere pertaining to the worship of God, it naturally follows that as believers they are marked off by some form of spiritual character."¹¹⁶ Thus the sacrament of ordination—which was instituted by Christ himself—leaves a particular imprint on the soul, which indicates that those in holy orders are marked off to perform certain spiritual functions. It is not in itself a sanctifying gift, being of a legal and official nature rather than a moral one. Empowered by the *character* a man can enjoy all the privileges and carry out all the duties of priesthood, including preaching and the ministry of the sacraments.

Once a priest, always a priest; having been conferred, the *character* is there to stay. This is made abundantly clear in the many *quaestiones* which defend the validity of that supreme sacrament, the Eucharist, as confectioned by the priest who has become either a heretic, schismatic, or excommunicate. The *Alexandri summa* canvasses the various opinions in some detail.¹¹⁷ Some say the consecration of a heretic is not valid. Others believe that a notorious heretic who has been damned by the Church cannot consecrate, whereas a man who is secretly a heretic can do so. Others say that heretics can consecrate because, although they are separated from the Church, they retain their priestly orders, which give them the necessary power. The last of these views is affirmed by the *Alexandri summa*, which enlists the support of Augustine, who argued that just as baptism remains in such men, so too their holy orders remain entire.¹¹⁸ A comparison is offered with the situation of a married couple who separate. Their marriage is not dissolved, even though they are cut off from conjugal works. Aquinas draws on the same passage from Augustine, adding the saint's statement that when those separated from the church return to it they are not reordained, indicating that they had not lost the power to consecrate. Of course, during their period of separation they did not act rightly, and sinned, if they consecrated: but that does not mean that their sacrament was invalid. Discussing the situation of the canonically degraded priest, Aquinas affirms the indelible nature of the *character* or sacramental imprint which the priest receives at his ordination.¹¹⁹ This is "perpetual, and cannot either be lost or repeated"; more specifically, it cannot be taken away by a bishop, just as "neither can he who baptizes take away the baptismal *character*."

To sum up: the position generally held was that a lay person can (*in extremis*, to be sure) confer the sacrament of baptism, imposing its distinctive, and permanent, *character*; however, since he lacks the *character* of ordination, that same layman is unable to consecrate the sacrament of the altar. On the other hand, the sacraments—including the confection of the Eucharist—which an ordained priest administers, are equally genuine whether they are administered by an evil priest or one who lives a holy life and is in good legal standing. Anyone can baptize if need be; even an old woman—that extreme test-case—*could* do it. *Vetula baptizat, et baptizatum est.*¹²⁰ But only a priest *should* do it. The ecclesiastical hierarchy is duly affirmed, its power maintained through that most exclusive of sacraments, the sacrament of holy orders.

Authority and Agency in the Tribunal of Penance

With the bestowal of the *character* came the gift of the power of the keys,¹²¹ as bequeathed by Christ to St. Peter and his successors in

perpetuity: “I will give you the keys of the kingdom of heaven, and whatever you bind on earth will be bound in heaven, and whatever you loose on earth will be loosed in heaven” (Matthew 16:19). This awesome legacy constituted the very basis of Christian priesthood, and legions of schoolmen sought to comprehend its grave responsibilities and celebrate its high prestige. “We have no doubt that we must entertain the most magnificent and lofty sentiments about the keys of the Church, their power and their priestly office,” says William of Auvergne (d. 1249), who taught first arts and then theology at the University of Paris and became Bishop of Paris in 1228. “For the keys have been given to the Church and their office and power to priests for the purpose of dispensing the riches of God’s mercy,” that they might make them open to those who knock, and lead in those who wish to enter.¹²² Pope John XXII succinctly defined the keys as “a special power of binding and loosing by which the ecclesiastical judge should receive the worthy into the kingdom of heaven and exclude the unworthy therefrom.”¹²³ But is the door of heaven not already open to Christians, especially in view of the fact that Christ Himself is the door (cf. John 10:7)? Yes indeed, explains Aquinas; the door of heaven “considered in itself ” is indeed open, but it is said to be closed to someone in the sense of there being some obstacle which prevents entry. That obstacle is sin, both original and actual. “Hence we need the sacraments and the keys of the Church.”¹²⁴ The sacrament of baptism removed original sin; the sacrament of penance was there to effect absolution from the guilt of sin (*culpa*) as committed by errant mortals after baptism. In the “tribunal of penance,” the penitent has to do his part, in being sincerely sorry for his sins and wishing to make amends, and the priest must do his, in judging the spiritual state of the sinner and, if he thinks fit, pronouncing the formula of absolution and imposing an appropriate punishment. On the part of the minister, the sacrament presupposes, in the first instance, valid reception of the order of priesthood. Not even the pope himself, declares Peter of la Palud O.P. (c. 1275/80–1342),¹²⁵ can give a nonpriest the power of absolution *in foro poenitentiali*. Second, it requires legal jurisdiction over the recipient; hence a priest is not supposed to hear the confessions of people who do not belong to his diocese. On the part of the recipient, the sacrament presupposes contrition, confession, and at least the promise of satisfaction. Generations of theologians agonized about the respective roles of priest and penitent in the *remissio peccatorum*.

Peter Lombard had, not for the first or last time, presented a crucial theological problem in a challenging way. He describes remission of sin as a gift of God that is given in the contrition stage of penance, before confession or satisfaction: “in contritione iam deletum

sit peccatum.”¹²⁶ Sins are effaced by contrition and humility of heart, without oral confession of the mouth and payment of the external penalty.¹²⁷ No-one who has a contrite and humble heart lacks charity, and he who has charity is worthy of eternal life.¹²⁸ Thus he is not freed afterward from eternal wrath by the priest to whom he confesses, since he was already freed from it by the Lord. God alone cleanses a man inwardly from the stain of sin, and absolves him from the debt of eternal punishment. True, priests have the power of the keys, but this does not mean that a priest has power to absolve from sin (*a peccato*), that is from guilt (*culpa*), so that he wipes away the stain of sin.¹²⁹ That does happen in the sacrament of penance, to be sure; what is at issue is the part played by the priest. According to the Lombard, that role is declarative: priests merely *show* men to be bound or loosed, and declare that the guilt of sin has been remitted by God through contrition.¹³⁰ This doctrine has several important concomitants, potentially subversive of sacerdotal authority: in the first instance one should confess to God, and if a priest is not available one may confess to a wise layman.

For all these reasons the Lombard has been termed a “staunch contritionist.”¹³¹ And he certainly differs from those twelfth-century “confessionists” who stressed the importance of the priest’s role in achieving absolution. Gratian, for example, while noting the necessity of contrition, had emphasized the importance of the external, juridical form of confession; “the moment when the penitent’s sins are remitted” being located at “the point when the priest pronounces the words of absolution.”¹³² Yet Peter Lombard was no naive believer in contrition. True, confession should be offered first to God. But, he adds, subsequently it should be offered to a priest, if the sinner has the opportunity to confess—“nor can the sinner otherwise approach the entrance of paradise.”¹³³ “He is not truly penitent who does not have the desire to confess”;¹³⁴ “it does not suffice to confess to God without the priest, nor is the sinner truly humble and penitent if he does not desire and seek the judgment of the priest.”¹³⁵ The full context of his remarks about the substitution of a layman for a priest is particularly revealing. Such a substitution should be done only if a priest is lacking; in general “the examination of a priest should be zealously sought.” And if one does confess to a companion, that action is given value by the evidence it affords of one’s “desire for a priest.”¹³⁶

The Lombard’s thirteenth-century commentators reviewed the competing authorities the *magister sententiarum* had marshaled, and sought to mitigate the possible dangers of some of his remarks. They had at their disposal the Aristotelian ideology of causality, which offered invaluable discourses relating to instrumentality and the relationship between formal and material causes. Hence Bonaventure

could elevate the priest's absolution as the formal element (the *forma sacramenti*), with the penitent's expression of contrition, confession, and satisfaction constituting the material element.¹³⁷ To say that *culpa* is remitted before the power of the keys operates would be as absurd as saying that the sacrament of baptism operates before the actual baptism has taken place. For Bonaventure, the priest—"he who has the key"—is a necessary mediator between God and man. "Through him the sinner mounts to God, and thus the priest is the mouthpiece of the sinner, speaking on behalf of the sinner; through him God descends to man, and thus the priest is the angel of God, in fact, the mouthpiece of God."¹³⁸ Similarly, Aquinas argued that the absolution of the priest is the *forma sacramenti*, and consequently confession, contrition, and satisfaction must in some way constitute the matter of the sacrament.¹³⁹ "God alone on his own authority absolves from sin and pardons sin,"¹⁴⁰ but He uses the instrumentality of absolution which, with confession, contrition, and satisfaction, concurs in obtaining forgiveness, in opening the kingdom of heaven. Delegated power this may be, but it is profound, substantial, indispensable. The Aristotelian theory of causality confers genuine agency on instrumental causes which operate under the primary efficient cause, which in this case is the prime and unmoved mover, God Himself.¹⁴¹

Echoing Peter Lombard, Aquinas argues that the power of forgiving sins was entrusted to priests—"not that they may forgive them by their own power, for this belongs to God, but that, as ministers, they may declare the operation of God who forgives."¹⁴² Now, such doctrine is very useful in, for example, reassuring the faithful that a priest's personal wickedness does not destroy his official use of the keys: "the priest is no more than a minister. Therefore he cannot by his wickedness take away from us the gift which God has given through him."¹⁴³ But this is very different from the Lombard's restricted sense of the power of the keys, as is manifest by Aquinas's treatment of the question, "whether holy men who are not priests have the keys." "No manner how much grace a man may have," Aquinas affirms, "he cannot produce the effect of the keys, unless he be appointed to that purpose by receiving holy orders."¹⁴⁴ What, then, of the Lombard's statement concerning confession to a layman? This may be done in case of necessity, Aquinas admits—but since a priest is not involved this is "not a perfect sacrament," and only a priest can perfect it. The penitent may well have received forgiveness from God, but "he is not yet reconciled to the Church"; therefore he must confess again to a priest, as soon as there is one at hand.¹⁴⁵ Anyone "who is not a priest can never absolve in the tribunal of penance."¹⁴⁶ Clearly, the sacramental role of a properly ordained priest, who has received the requisite *character* and possesses the power of the keys, is crucial.

The keys, as Aquinas puts it in the *Summa contra gentiles*, derive their efficacy from the passion of Christ, and confession was instituted “in order to make the fault of the penitent known to the minister of Christ. The minister, therefore, to whom confession is made must have judiciary power representing Christ, “who was appointed to be the judge of the living and the dead” (Acts 10:42).¹⁴⁷ “For those sinning after baptism there can be no salvation unless they submit themselves to the keys of the Church,” which entails actual confession or the desire to confess when opportunity permits.¹⁴⁸ In this way Aquinas seeks to avoid “the error of some”—no doubt he has the Lombard’s contrary authorities in mind—“who held that a man can achieve forgiveness of sins without confession and without the purpose of confessing”: in fact, one cannot “achieve the remission of his sins without confession and absolution.”¹⁴⁹ Here the priest’s role is clear, his power secure.

It was precisely this power which Wyclif’s followers sought to diminish, and they found an unlikely ally in Peter Lombard, who is quoted with approval in the Lollard *Rosarium theologie* (a late fourteenth-century compilation).¹⁵⁰ Here “absolucion” is defined “in þre maneres”: “auctoritatie,” which accords to God alone; “denunciatiue or schewyng of office” which is limited to priests, and “dispositiue or disposyng,” by which a man disposes himself by “verey contricion for to lose his oune bondes of synne.”¹⁵¹ These ideas in themselves are quite orthodox,¹⁵² but in the *Rosarium* in particular and in Lollard theology in general great emphasis is placed on the direct relationship between the absolving God and the contrite man, with the dispositive role of the priest (“trewe schewyng of Godis absolucion goyng afore”)¹⁵³ either being downplayed or dispensed with entirely. Anti-sacerdotal trends loom large in lists of heretical propositions attributed to Wyclif and his followers. For example, the 1382 Blackfriars council condemned the view that “if a man be truly contrite, all exterior confession is superfluous for him or useless,”¹⁵⁴ while in 1430 Hawisia Moone recanted the belief that “confession shuld be maad oonly to God and to noon oþer prest, for no prest hath poar to remitte synne ne to assoile a man of ony synne.”¹⁵⁵ Richard Wyche (who was arrested by the bishop of Durham c. 1402) believed that if confession is necessary one should not approach a vicious priest, but instead find a discreet confessor who is living a good life. If you confess fully to him, you will be absolved as fully as if St. Peter himself had descended from heaven to perform the absolution!¹⁵⁶ Even more memorably, John Sprat (in 1472) preferred to confess to a tree rather than to a priest.¹⁵⁷

Hawisia Moone was one among many Wycliffites who rejected the priestly power of the keys outright; however, Lollardy being (so to

speak) a very broad church, one need not be surprised at the basically orthodox definition of the two keys in the *Rosarium theologie*, which in this respect remains true to Peter Lombard. They are described as being “of konnyng and of pouer,”¹⁵⁸ the first denoting the priestly authority to interrogate the penitent and thus gain knowledge of the facts of the case, and the second, the authority to grant or refuse absolution. Another understanding of the keys, however, had come to prominence in the thirteenth century, namely, the distinction between the power of order (i.e., power exercised in regard to priestly ministry) and the power of jurisdiction. Aquinas explains that the key of order “reaches to heaven itself directly, by remitting sin and thus removing the obstacles to the entrance into heaven.” And priests alone have this key. The key of jurisdiction, by contrast, may be exercised by those who are not ordained priests, for example, by archdeacons and bishops elect (i.e., who have not yet received holy orders).¹⁵⁹ Women, Aquinas continues, cannot have either key, because “woman is in a state of subjection” (cf. I Timothy 2:11, Titus 2:5), and therefore “she can have no spiritual jurisdiction” since, as Aristotle also says, “it is a corruption of public life (*corruptio urbanitatis*) when the government comes into the hands of a woman [*Ethics viii*].” In sum, all priests, no matter how good or bad their personal lives, possess the power of the keys, while no woman, no matter how good, can have it. What, then, of abbesses, who seem to exercise some sort of spiritual power over their subordinates? Somewhat awkwardly, Aquinas adds a rider to the effect that a certain—very limited—use of the keys may be allowed to women in that position, “such as the right to correct other women who are under them, on account of the danger that might threaten if men were to dwell under the same roof.”¹⁶⁰ The prospect of the priestly *character* being imprinted on a woman was, of course, quite unacceptable within the orthodox late-medieval theology of *ordo*; a woman’s body was deemed incapable of receiving such a mark of distinction.¹⁶¹

The key of *ordo*, then, was the key of ministry, as “conferred on priests when by being anointed they receive power from God.”¹⁶² And “the power of orders” was established for “the dispensation of the sacraments.”¹⁶³ The key of jurisdiction functioned differently, and was put to other uses: in particular, it constituted the authority for the issue of indulgences, or “pardons” as they were popularly called in English. *Indulgentiae autem facere pertinet ad clavem iurisdictionis, non autem ad clavem ordinis*, to quote William Lyndwood (c. 1375–1446),¹⁶⁴ Bishop of St. Davids and right-hand man of Archbishop Chichele in his proceedings against the Lollards.

Since the sacramental forgiveness of sin was believed to extend both to the guilt and to the (potential) eternal punishment thereof in

hell, it followed that the Church could also free the penitent from the lesser, “temporal” or temporary punishment (i.e., punishment in this life—as imposed by the priest following confession—and also in purgatory, where sinners were incarcerated for a fixed and finite term).¹⁶⁵ An extra-sacramental means of doing this was devised, in the form of indulgences, the term *indulgentia* deriving from the Latin verb *indulgeo*, meaning to be kind or tender: hence indulgences were favors dispensed to the spiritually needy. The pope or bishop who “made” indulgences—the verb *facere* being commonly used in this context, as is *concedere*, meaning “to grant”—acted not in any personal manner, but in his official capacity as having jurisdiction within the Church. In other words, he was authorized by his possession of the key of jurisdiction; technically, he did not have to possess the other key (the key of *ordo*) to perform this specific action, which was not a sacrament and therefore did not require ordination and the priestly *character* on the part of its maker.

Since Christ left the Church the power to forgive sins (through penance) the power of granting indulgences may be deemed a logical inference. But it was a deeply problematic one—difficult to explain even in the most distinguished schools of medieval theology, and impossible to communicate with sufficient clarity to the public at large (assuming, of course, that those who “published” or preached the terms of references of pardons actually wanted their audiences to know the whole truth). Conflict between the spiritual and the material economies was rife, the depth of confusion extraordinary. Such were the conditions in which the real-life models of Chaucer’s Pardoner thrived.

III. MAKING INDULGENCES: SPIRITUAL AND MATERIAL ECONOMIES

An indulgence may be understood as the remission—or, better, the payment by others—of a sinner’s debt of punishment (*poena*) for sins already forgiven through the sacrament of penance, wherein moral guilt (*culpa*) was removed. An indulgence, then, was concerned solely with the satisfaction due for the requisite penitential punishment.¹⁶⁶ The debt was paid out of the Church’s vast spiritual treasury, as filled superabundantly with the merits of Christ and His Saints.¹⁶⁷ This may be seen as a development from the Church’s belief in the Communion of Saints and the unity of Christians within Christ’s mystical body. The principle of vicarious satisfaction goes back to the early Church;¹⁶⁸ the practice of saying masses to help the souls of sinners pass the more quickly through purgatorial fires was also of long standing. From the

eleventh century onward, however, we have clear evidence of indulgences being granted as remissions in whole or in part of the penance which a priest would normally have imposed—or which he already had imposed—following a person’s confession of his or her sins.¹⁶⁹ Thus, indulgences were believed to alleviate the “temporal” punishments which the sinner would have to undergo whether in this life or in the next—that is, in purgatory (where time existed also).¹⁷⁰ Their power certainly did not extend to the eternal punishments of hell. The “birth” of purgatory¹⁷¹ was utterly essential for the growth of the theology of indulgences.

A sinner could give alms for some charitable work, such as the building and/or upkeep of a hospital, school, or church; in return he or she would receive an indulgence. Indulgences were also granted to those who went on certain approved pilgrimages, visited important churches—or, indeed, served in Palestine in one of the campaigns to recover the Holy Land for Christianity. At the Council of Clermont (1095) it was proclaimed that anyone who had “set forth for the liberation of the Church of God in Jerusalem” who was motivated by “devotion alone, and not for the purpose of gaining honours and wealth” was to have that journey “reckoned in place of all penance.”¹⁷² Urban II exhorted bishops to preach this project to their congregations with eloquence and enthusiasm, thereby ensuring a good supply of “battlers for God’s people”—but he emphasized the importance of confession and true repentance for gaining “speedy pardon from Christ.”¹⁷³ The Fourth Lateran Council of 1215 extended this indulgence, granting full pardon of sins—i.e., a plenary indulgence, meaning a release from all *poena*¹⁷⁴—not only to those who personally went on crusade but also to those who sent “suitable men” at “their own expense and in accordance with their means”; furthermore, some degree of pardon was promised to those who had made a “suitable contribution from their property.” Once again, the “spirit of devotion” which the participants had to possess was insisted upon—but it is difficult to avoid the impression of a sliding scale of pardon which functioned in relation to the amount of material contribution, whether militaristic or monetary, which one was able or willing to offer.

Henry Charles Lea found “grandeur and consolation in this noble theory of the solidarity of mankind for good and not for evil as long as it had not assumed the shape of a fund out of which the Church could arbitrarily for money compound the sins of an individual.”¹⁷⁵ But that is what it seems to have become. True, the traffic in indulgences helped to ensure that churches were constructed or repaired, that schools and hospitals received adequate funding, and the roads and bridges which enabled access to them were well maintained—the

practical benefits could be considerable and should be given their due.¹⁷⁶ But the system could all too easily be abused by both high and low, from the supreme pontiff to the lowliest pardoner or priest who had been ordered to advertise the issue of some new indulgence.

“Little can be said about indulgences with certainty,” said Durandus of St. Pourçain O.P. (c. 1275–1334) with masterly understatement, “because nothing is said expressly about them in Scripture.” Besides, the saints, such as Ambrose, Hilary, Augustine, and Jerome, have little to say on the subject.¹⁷⁷ This lack of guidance was exacerbated by many sources of confusion, one of which concerned the distinction between *poena* and *culpa*: the very different powers of the two keys (of *ordo* and of jurisdiction) could easily be muddled. Boniface VIII’s genuine bull promised “the most total forgiveness of all sins” to those who filled the conditions for the indulgence associated with the first Roman Jubilee (1300).¹⁷⁸ Yet contemporary chroniclers went further. The *Nuova Cronica* of Giovanni Villani (c. 1276–1348) spoke of a “full and entire pardon of all sins . . . both of guilt and punishment (*di culpa e di pena*),” while the *Chronicon Astense* of Guglielmo Ventura di Asti (1250–1310?) supposed that all the recipients of the indulgence would be “as free, as from the day of their baptism, of every sin, both from guilt and from punishment (*tam a culpa, quam a poena*).”¹⁷⁹ Even the *doctor resolutus*, John Baconthorpe (c. 1290–1346), who rose to become head of the English Carmelites, could make the unwary remark that in a jubilee year the pope may absolve *a culpa et a pena*, in the course of affirming that simple priests possess the power of penitential absolution but not of full absolution, that being the pope’s prerogative.¹⁸⁰ Catherine of Siena (1347–80) could suppose that the indulgence she had received from “the holy father” himself (in this case Gregory XI) afforded remission from both “sin and punishment” (*di colpa e di pane*).¹⁸¹ Francis of Meyronnes O.F.M. (c. 1285–after 1328) went so far as to remark that it is commonly taught (“communiter docetur”) that indulgences *a pena et a culpa* may be granted. In fact, he explains, this cannot be, because *culpa* is a matter repugnant to indulgences, and can be remitted only through contrition and confession.¹⁸² Similar treatments of the topic are afforded by Bonifatius de Amanatis and William of Montlaudun,¹⁸³ both of whom seek to blame the confusion on a failure of comprehension by the uneducated. According to Bonifatius, the belief that indulgences can deliver absolution *a pena et a culpa* is a vulgar misunderstanding rather than a legal fact (*est non a iure, sed a vulgo*), and William speaks of how such remission of sin as was granted by jubilee year indulgences offered absolution merely from *pena*, though “vulgarly” they were supposed to afford release from both guilt and punishment (*vulgo a pena et a culpa dicitur*).

Such confusion was, to be sure, often castigated. Clement V included in his list of abuses committed by *quaestores* their claim to absolve people from all kinds of horrendous sin, including perjury and murder, and to absolve from both punishment and punishment (“a pena et a culpa absolvunt”), those being the very terms they used.¹⁸⁴ But all the blame may not be placed at the feet of the pardoners, any more than it may be put down to “vulgar” misunderstanding. Some popes themselves went beyond the limits of strict theological propriety—as when, for example, Celestine V, on the occasion of his consecration (in 1294) in the church of St. Maria of Collemadio, said that anyone who visited this church on that day should receive an indulgence *a poena et a culpa* for all sins committed since infancy.¹⁸⁵ True, he did say that the recipients had to be truly repentant and confessed, but the phrasing was certainly misleading. Then again, one of the charges brought against Pope John XXIII on 25 May 1415 (in the course of the Council of Constance) was that he had acted scandalously in authorizing the sale of indulgences *a culpa et poena*.¹⁸⁶

In other cases the confusion probably arose from the failure of papal bulls to spell out the necessity of contrition on the recipients’ part, with phrases such as “vere poenitentibus et confessis” or “corde contritis et ore confessis”;¹⁸⁷ thus a plenary indulgence (from *poena* alone) could easily be mistaken as a release *a poena et a culpa*. The phrase *a poena et a culpa* seems to have come into common (though of course misguided) use with reference to plenary indulgences in particular,¹⁸⁸ and the fact that Boniface IX (1389–1404) finally bowed to pressure and revoked all indulgences which contained it is clear evidence that many such misleading documents were in circulation.¹⁸⁹ He did not cease dispensing pardons for the greater glory of St. Peter’s, however, and the traffic in indulgences was so widespread and well established that effective regulation was impossible.

John Wyclif and his followers found indulgences an easy target for condemnation. Such “marchaundise of shriftes and graunting of indulgencis” is evidence that the pope is setting himself up over and above God, declares a typical account. The truth of the matter is that “no man mai forȝyve synne but if Crist forȝyve it first,” and if Christ’s vicars sell indulgences rather than tell the will of Christ they “chaffaren [barter] wiþ Goddis power, and gabben [practice deceit] as fendis on her God”; they may claim that Christ has absolved the sinner, yet the sin is left worse than it was before.¹⁹⁰ Many Lollards were particularly exercised by the fact that, during the great schism, the rival popes Urban VI (1378–89) and Clement VII (1378–94) blatantly issued indulgences in their own political interests, promising, as the Lollards saw it, “assoilinge” of sin as a reward for killing fellow-Christians.¹⁹¹ The doctrine of the spiritual treasury of supererogatory

merits, of which every each and every pope was “maad dispensour . . . a this owne will,” was dismissed as a “fantasye”—why, this would make the pope into a “lord” who ruled over “Crist and opere seyntis in hevene”!¹⁹²

Matters came to a head, as is well known, with Martin Luther’s virulent reaction against Julius II’s bull *Liquet omnibus* (1510), which offered “the fullest remission of all sins” to those who contributed financially to the restoration of St. Peter’s.¹⁹³ Luther’s *Ninety-Five Theses* (of 1517) hypothesized that in this regard the pope lacked the power of the keys, and was able only to remit any penalties which he himself had imposed.¹⁹⁴ These are followed by the proposition that “any Christian who is truly contrite has full remission of both punishment and guilt as his due, even without a letter of pardon.” “If the pope knew the demands made by the pardon-preachers,” Luther continues, “he would prefer to have St. Peter’s basilica reduced to ashes than built with the skin, flesh and bones of his sheep.” Their practices provoke “slander” and “shrewd questions” from the laity.¹⁹⁵ For instance, if the pope is willing “to redeem an infinite number of souls for the sake of sordid money for building a basilica, the most trivial of causes,” why does he not “empty purgatory for the sake of holy charity and the great need of souls, the most just of causes?” Most provocative of all is the suggestion that it is “madness” to “hold the view that papal pardons are of such value as to be able to absolve even a man who (to assume the impossible) had violated the Mother of God”—raped the Virgin Mary! Here Luther becomes violently outrageous to ridicule the notion that punishment for any sin, however abominable, may be avoided through the mere purchase of a pardon.

The “wanton preaching of pardons,” Luther postulated, made it difficult even for learned men to defend the pope from “calumnious charges or even from the shrewd questioning of the laity.” During the previous three centuries, church councils, individual theologians, and indeed individual popes had felt the strain of defending a system which was, in certain respects at least, well-nigh indefensible. One did not have to be a Lollard or a Luther to be troubled deeply by the exchange of earthly profit for spiritual, to feel the tension between the relatively trivial preoccupations of Christ’s church on earth—no matter how worthy certain projects funded by indulgences could be—and the holy mystery of human redemption together with the inexpressible glory of the heavenly Jerusalem. Was the principle of vicarious satisfaction really secure? Did wealthy people have an unfair advantage? Could they buy their way out of purgatory, while the poor (as on earth) had to suffer and endure for their allotted time? Did the indulgence-system not bring the church into disrepute, and how could

one answer those who found it ridiculous or laughable? All those questions, and more, were confronted by the major theologians of the later Middle Ages. There was a widespread recognition of the gulf between abstract justification of the doctrinal issues, and the semi-comprehensions of the humble priests who were obliged to explain the complicated system to layfolk. To their credit, the schoolmen are aware of the communication gap. And yet, they seem powerless to do anything about it.

Marketing the Divine Mercy

Over and over again, the deeply disturbing thought presented itself to medieval theologians: were the makers and distributors of indulgences engaged in some sort of market economy, which demeaned the whole notion of posthumous reward and punishment by confusing earthly with heavenly matters, and, worse, created the impression that salvation was up for sale? Albert the Great, among many others, worried about the spiritual arithmetic—it seemed as if an enterprising sinner could get a great deal for a mere *obolus* (meaning a very small monetary unit, and hereafter translated as “halfpenny”): “Let us suppose that a fast of seven years was enjoined on someone, and that he comes on one day seven times to a church which has from the pope the power of granting an indulgence of one year, and each time he makes an offering of a half-penny. Therefore that man is absolved on one day, for seven half-pennies, from the seven years of penance justly enjoined upon him! It would be amazing if even infidels did not laugh at this state of affairs.”¹⁹⁶ The point of that last sentence seems to be that, if even infidels can laugh this situation, how much more ridiculous must it seem to believers. Albert’s answer is that “there is no delusion in the truth.” It is not simply a matter of the church receiving a meager offering, “as those mockers believe.”¹⁹⁷ The sinner’s own means and spiritual situation must be considered, along with the powers of the Church.

William of Auvergne employs the same monetary metaphor, in reporting the ridicule of those who say that, for a single penny, halfpenny, or even an egg given to a church, a man might obtain remission of a third of the penance which had been imposed on him. Thus it seems that God is defrauded, for two years of penance are commuted with the paltry offering of one egg or halfpenny.¹⁹⁸ Furthermore, long and severe penances can be bought off with little effort and lightly, a penny or halfpenny being reckoned as equal to a third part of remission and penance. Those who hold such stupid opinions think that divine grace is being made venal. No matter how gravely men sin, they can obtain remission in a way which is facile and ridiculous, the gift of three pennies being put on a par with

pilgrimage to Jerusalem or any other major undertaking against the enemies of the faith. People would be crazy to endure long penances and laborious pilgrimages, when they could get the same result with three eggs or three halfpennies! William counters this *stultitia opinionis* with the argument that venality is not involved since the prelate who gives an indulgence of the type under discussion is acting not for money but for the honor of God and the benefit of souls. A church is built not on account of money (*propter pecunia*) but by money (*per pecuniam*), and without money the building could not be undertaken. Similarly, an indulgence is issued not for money but solely for the glory of God, although money is not absent from the transaction. William proceeds to offer a comparison with the sacrament of baptism. Here remission of sins is achieved not for water (*pro aqua*) but by water (*per aquam*) and not without water (*non sine aquam*). Just so, indulgences function not on account of money (*non pro pecuniam*) but by money (*per pecuniam*) and not without money (*non sine pecuniam*).¹⁹⁹ As for the concern that one and the same price or cost (*pretio*) will pay for both major and minor penances: people who talk in that way reveal their ignorance of the strength (*virtus*) of God and the power of the keys. For, just as a greater remission of sin is not gained by the person who has been baptized with more rather than less water, so the person who offers more money does not have greater remission than the person who offers less. And this is so because, just as in baptism remission comes not from water but from divine *virtus*, so in the case of indulgences remission comes not from the giving or from the gift but from the keys and the ministration of prelates. William proceeds to argue that prelates are perfectly entitled to augment or diminish the satisfaction due for the sins which a penitent has acknowledged in confession.

But, could the sale of indulgences not be regarded as a kind of simony, which is to be understood as the exchange of a spiritual for a temporal thing? Thomas Aquinas asserts that indulgences are granted not “for the sake of temporal matters as such, but in so far as they are subordinate to spiritual things,” such as the suppression of the Church’s enemies, “the building of a church, of a bridge, and other forms of almsgiving.” Therefore, “there is no simony in these transactions, since a spiritual thing is exchanged, not for a temporal but for a spiritual commodity.”²⁰⁰ Albert the Great also answers with a firm negative: what we are dealing with here is not a mere purchase of some commodity but rather an exercise of the bounty of the Church, which encourages her children to good.²⁰¹

There was some discussion of the actual sources of that bounty, the exact constitution of the spiritual treasury. The *Alexandri summa* focuses on the merits of the united Church and of its head, who is

Christ;²⁰² Albert the Great says that it comprises the wealth of the merits and the passion of Christ, and of the glorious Virgin Mary, and all the apostles, martyrs, and saints both living and dead.²⁰³ Thomas Aquinas initially emphasizes the unity of the “mystical body in which many have performed works of satisfaction exceeding the requirements of their debts,” and hence much surplus merit is available to those who are in need of it, but the preeminent source is soon identified as the merits of Christ, who acts through His sacraments yet is in no way obliged to operate exclusively through them. “So great is the quantity of such merits that it exceeds the entire debt of punishment due to those who are living at this moment”—there is no danger whatever, it would seem, of those vast resources running out.²⁰⁴ An even more eloquent affirmation of the merits of Christ is found in the papal bull which at last (as late as 1343) proclaimed as dogma the existence of an infinite treasury of merits, Clement VI’s *Unigenitus*. “Christ shed of His blood not merely a drop, though this would have sufficed . . . to redeem the whole human race, but a copious torrent,” thereby “laying up an infinite treasure for mankind. This treasure He neither wrapped up in a napkin nor hid in a field, but entrusted to Blessed Peter, the key-bearer, and his successors, that they might, for just and reasonable causes, distribute it to the faithful in full or in partial remission of the temporal punishment due to sin.”²⁰⁵ Powerful words, which express well the emotive force of the foundational theology of indulgences, the strength of its confidence in the bottomless depths of divine love.

But what was a “just and reasonable cause”? Albert the Great suggested that the cause moving the maker of an indulgence should be not private but public (*non privata, sed publica*). There are two types of public cause, he explains, which involve legitimate exigency (*necessitas*) and public advantage (*utilitas*) respectively.²⁰⁶ Examples of the former include the liberation of the Holy Land and perils which threaten the faith; of the latter, relieving poverty, hearing the word of God, and visiting relics. Bonaventure compares the spiritual treasury with the treasuries of earthly kings. We see in political matters and human affairs that a state’s resources are deployed for two main reasons: the glory of the prince and the good of the community or because of what is necessary for it, as when something strikes at the state, stipends and donations are produced in order that its soldiers may go out to fight. Similarly with the Church, there is a twofold cause for dispensing from the treasury. First, is the praise of God and His Saints, which is done through the construction and visitation of churches in their honor and the commemoration of their virtues in sermons. Second, the general good of the Church involves the defense of the Holy Land, the defense of the faith, the promotion of study, and

suchlike. Bonaventure concludes that indulgences are appropriately directed to such ends.²⁰⁷ These points (and many others concerning penance and indulgences) are made in almost identical terms in the *Alexandri summa*—a reminder of the fact that this highly influential treatise was completed by Alexander’s pupils after his death.²⁰⁸ It is asserted that the place of Christ’s passion must not be bartered away to the infidels; the memory of the passion must not slip from the minds of the faithful. Indulgences may reasonably be made by a pope if the necessity of the Church requires it, and especially for the defense of the faith.²⁰⁹

A host of legalistic questions arose—and not just in the rarefied atmosphere of the *Sentences* commentaries and *summae*—concerning people who genuinely wanted to travel to places of pilgrimage but were unable to do so, through no fault of their own. For instance, if a crusader dies before he can take the journey across the sea, has he full forgiveness of sins? That all depends on the form of the papal letter, Aquinas explains. If “an indulgence is conceded to those taking the cross in aid of the Holy Land, a crusader has an indulgence at once, even if he dies before he takes the journey.” But if the letter specifies that an indulgence will be “given those who cross the sea, he who dies before he crosses lacks the cause of the indulgence” and hence does not benefit from it.²¹⁰ Bonaventure wondered if a person who takes the cross, makes the vow and has the perfect intention of going overseas, obtains remission of all sins by dint of that alone, i.e., what is crucial being the intention rather than the act. His answer is that, according to the experts (*periti*) and despite what certain “vulgar preachers” say, such a person does not have a total indulgence. Indulgences are not given just because one wishes to do something; actual performance is also necessary. Only the penitent who combines both will enjoy the full indulgence, though Bonaventure concedes that one with the desire alone may gain great merit through his devotion.²¹¹

However, despite what the *periti* said, on numerous occasions the desire was taken for the deed. We have already noted how the Fourth Lateran Council had granted plenary indulgences to those who sent “suitable men” to Palestine at “their own expense” rather than going themselves.²¹² Furthermore, despite Pope Clement VI’s initial efforts to ensure that people actually went on pilgrimage to Rome to earn the benefits of the indulgences he had issued for the 1350 jubilee, he found it expedient to dispense with this in the case of Queen Elizabeth of Hungary.²¹³ The same privilege was bestowed upon King Edward III of England, his wife, his mother, Edward prince of Wales, and Henry earl of Lancaster—not to mention the entire population of Mallorca. (Confusion was heaped upon confusion by the fact that the bull

proclaiming the jubilee, *Unigenitus*, circulated in a forged version which offered far more generous terms than had the original.)²¹⁴ The extravagant commutations of vows associated with the antipope, Clement VII, were mocked by Lollard writers, as in the caustic remark that a man might stay at home and get himself forty thousand years' pardon by noon.²¹⁵ In desperate need of money, Boniface IX recklessly offered indulgences *ad instar*, meaning that many minor (indeed some quite insignificant) shrines were allowed to dispense the indulgences of major ones; hence, as Jonathan Sumption says, "most Christians were able to win the [papal] Jubilee Indulgence of 1390 at churches within a few miles of their homes."²¹⁶

The schoolmen were engaged in a major effort of retrospective rationalization: indulgences had and were being issued, and their efficacy had to be maintained. The Universal Ruler of the Church is not believed to be fallible, declares Albert the Great, particularly with regard to those things which the whole Church receives and approves. Since he has ordered indulgences to be preached, they must be valid.²¹⁷ Likewise, Aquinas is confident that "the universal Church cannot err"; if it approves and grants indulgences, it may be assumed that they must "have some value."²¹⁸ Everyone admits this, he continues, "for it would be blasphemy to say that the Church does anything in vain." Above all else, the conviction that what God's Church on earth unbinds is also released in heaven was consistently affirmed, the schoolmen being anxious to make the point that there was no risk of deception. Bonaventure attributes to "some" unnamed men of straw a dangerous distinction "between God's tribunal and the Church's tribunal" and the belief that "relaxations do not take place in, nor are they understood of, God's tribunal, but only of the Church's tribunal."²¹⁹ This opinion, says Bonaventure, is destructive of the very concept of relaxation, for if the earthly Church relaxes what God does not relax, it must be adjudged "a deception rather than a relaxation, and it must be called cruelty rather than piety, since by lessening the penance in this life it induces sufferings more severe in the life to come" (the pains of purgatory being more acute, according to common belief, than anything that one could experience in this life). The same point is made in almost identical terms in the fourth and final part of the *Alexandri summa*.²²⁰ *Relaxatio* cannot be made solely in the tribunal of the Church; God alleviates what the Church alleviates.

The shocking suggestion that indulgences might be some sort of pious fraud was also confronted. One of the "ancient opinions" concerning their use, Albert explains (though without naming authorities), is that they are not valid at all, and thus we are dealing with a well-intentioned deception of the type which a mother

practices with her sons, which in the case of the Church induces its members to good actions, such as pilgrimages, almsgiving, hearing the word of God, and the like.²²¹ Albert develops the *exemplum* of a caring mother who wants to encourage her children to walk, since this is good for their health. Thus she promises an apple as a reward for going on an expedition—which afterward is not given. But this comparison with a “children’s game” degrades what the Church actually does, concludes Albert; indeed, it smacks of heresy. The Church would not be believed in anything, if deception were discovered in those things which are preached to the people and which they are exhorted to do. Bonaventure and Aquinas also address the *exemplum* of the mother’s white lie, and are equally dismissive. This is a very dangerous assertion to make, says Aquinas, for, as Augustine says, “if any error were discovered in Holy Writ, the authority of Holy Writ would perish”; by the same token, “if any error were to be found in the Church’s preaching, her doctrine would have no authority in settling questions of faith.”²²² For Bonaventure the suggestion that the Church engages in a sort of lying, and in activity which is inane, childish, and facetious, is highly demeaning of its activities.²²³

That comment of Bonaventure’s forms part of his *quaestio* on the issue of whether indulgences really have the value with which they are credited in preaching.²²⁴ The pope (who has commanded such preaching) is certainly not given to lying, he assures us. Moreover, if a certain bishop is able to give indulgences of twenty or forty days, and the pope has more power than any bishop (in that he has the plenitude of power over and above all others), therefore it would seem that for him, so to speak, the sky is the limit. Bonaventure also engages in arithmetical *reductio ad absurdum* of a kind reminiscent of Albert’s. Given that in certain indulgences a third of the due repentance is involved, then if first one *denarius* is given and secondly another and thirdly a third, it would appear that a person who had committed a thousand sins would be completely freed for three halfpennies or *denarii*—which would not only be false but would be judged as ludicrous by all those of right mind. Furthermore, if a sinner who owes nine years has three years remitted, on the same reckoning those who owe thirty should have ten remitted: it would seem that sinfulness is treated as a commodity. Then again, is it fair that a person who lives near a church should get the same benefit as the person who lives a long way away, and expends considerable effort to visit it? And that a rich man, in paying his halfpenny, should get the same benefit as a poor woman, for whom that money means a lot more?

Bonaventure responds with what “is said generally according to

the doctors,” that in order for indulgences or *relaxationes* to be effective, there must be a twofold condition on the part of the giver and a twofold condition on the part of the receiver. The giver must have the appropriate power and a cause which is honest and reasonable. The receiver must have confessed with true contrition and have faith with true devotion, so that he is truly repentant and confident that the pastor’s indulgence will be valid for him. “Others say,” continues Bonaventure, that in absolute terms indulgences are worth what they are said to be, because their conferral is not adjudged a purchase but rather an exercise of the Church’s liberality, and this is equally allotted to all those who dispose themselves to receive it. A rich man, going to a tavern, receives the same wine as does a poor old woman (*vetula paupercula*), the price being the same for both. The argument is that indulgences should be understood in the same way. But this seems to be making “too great a market of indulgences” (*magnum forum facere de indulgentiis*), and results in their vilification rather than their praise. Bonaventure suggests that the person who actually gives the indulgence to the recipient must consider the cause for which the indulgence was issued; to the extent, more or less, that the recipient approaches near that cause, he can participate more or less in the indulgence. For example, in the case of the stations of Rome there are set indulgences instituted by the holy fathers, who were mindful of pilgrims who came from remote places. They did not estimate a person living near the church to be worthy of such grace; hence the locals are to receive a lesser indulgence. Bonaventure may not have been wholly comfortable with the idea that a given indulgence is not worth the same to everyone but must be calibrated with reference to what the recipient has done or has to do. For he declares that it is “not becoming” to teach this doctrine openly,²²⁵ because all the faithful should believe in their hearts that the gifts of the holy Spirit are given with equal value to all.

Thomas Aquinas took issue with Bonaventure’s discussion. The argument that a man may “obtain remission in whole or in part” according as he approached near to “the cause for which the indulgence was granted” simply does not explain “the custom of the Church,” he declares, which assigns “now a greater, now a lesser indulgence, for the same cause.”²²⁶ For the pope may grant “now a year’s indulgence, now one of only forty days” to people visiting one and the same church on different occasions. The effective cause of the remission of *poena*, Aquinas continues, “is *not* the devotion, or toil, or gift of the recipient,” or indeed “the cause for which the indulgence was granted.” We cannot, therefore, estimate the quantity of remission by any of these but “solely by the merits of the Church—and these are superabundant.” In other words, the scope and scale of an indulgence

depends not on man but on God, whose liberality is dispensed by His authorized representatives on earth. Hence “we do not have too great a market of the divine mercy”—a clear allusion to Bonaventure’s statement as quoted above. Aquinas sides rather with the views of certain “others”—among whom may be numbered William of Auvergne and Peter of Tarantasia²²⁷—who believed that “indulgences have precisely the efficacy claimed for them,” providing that he who grants them has the necessary authority, the recipient has charity, and there is a pious reason for the grant, involving “the honour of God and the profit of our neighbour.”²²⁸ Aquinas proceeds to argue that a person who lives near the church, along with its priest and clergy, gains the associated indulgence “as much as those who come perhaps a distance of a thousand days’ journey, because the remission . . . is proportionate not to the toil, but to the merits which are applied.” His desire to celebrate the vast riches of the spiritual treasury, and the generous operation of the divine mercy, is evident.

But, of course, caveats and conditions must be admitted. It is duly noted that sometimes a distinction may be expressed, as when the pope specifies that an indulgence of five years may be granted “to those who come from across the seas,” but only one of three years “to those who come from across the mountains.”²²⁹ Furthermore, Aquinas continues, when an indulgence is given in a general way to anyone who helps toward the building of a church, this must be understood as meaning “a help proportionate to the giver.” Consequently, “a poor man by giving one halfpenny (*denarius*) would gain the full indulgence,” but “not so a rich man, whom it would not become to give so little to so holy and profitable a work”—that difference is, as it were, assumed within the original grant of the indulgence, wholly in accord with the giver’s intention. In sum, the indulgence has the full value as set by the individual who makes it, and this may accommodate certain distinctions (as just illustrated) or changes (say, from one time period to another). Of himself the recipient does not have the power to maximize or minimize that value, to alter it in accordance with the degree of effort he may have put into attaining the indulgence—the point being that the merit involved comes not from him but from the spiritual treasury.

Aquinas’s reference to the forty days’ limit on standard indulgences recalls a restriction which the Fourth Lateran Council had sought to impose. But there was an apparent loophole: if a man visits a church several times a day, does he not gain its forty-day indulgence on each and every occasion, thereby accumulating an extraordinary number of spiritual credits? It is all a matter of wording, explains Aquinas. If the indulgence is granted for a fixed term, as when it is said that “Whoever visits such and such a church until such and such a day,

shall gain so much indulgence,” then the pardon can be gained only once. (Peter of la Palud disagreed—it can be gained once *daily*, he thought.)²³⁰ If, on the other hand, the indulgence is continuous—“as in the indulgence of forty days to be gained in the church of the Blessed Peter”—then “a person gains the indulgence as often as he visits the church”: *quoties vadit aliquis, toties indulgentiam consequitur*.²³¹ Clearly, living in Rome had enormous advantages. Little wonder that “Our Lord Jesus Christ” instructed St. Bridget of Sweden (d. 1373) to “go to Rome, where the streets are paved with gold and reddened with the blood of saints” and where there is “a shorter way” to heaven “because of the indulgences that the holy pontiffs have merited by their prayers.”²³²

What, then, of St. Paul’s assertion that before Christ’s tribunal each one will receive what he has won, according to his works, whether good or evil (II Corinthians 5:10)? Or the psalmist’s statement that God repays to all according to their works (Psalm 61:13)? If people are impenitent, surely granting them indulgences cannot be defended, William Lyndwood speculates,²³³ because while they still retain the guilt (*culpa*) it is impossible to remit the punishment. The power of binding and freeing was handed down to ministers for edification and not for destruction. But an indulgence, which is a gratuitous remission of sin, tends to destruction, because by this process sin remains unpunished. Indeed, the facility of pardon encourages men to sin. In response to these arguments Lyndwood stresses the importance of contrition on the part of the penitent, which relates to justice, and the satisfaction which is rendered through the Church’s communication of the merits of the saints, which relates to mercy. Therefore both justice and mercy are given their due. More elaborate treatments were on offer. Bonaventure and the *Alexandri summa* make a crucial distinction between the punitive and medicinal aspects of penance.²³⁴ Indulgences relate only to the former. If, however, we talk in terms of medicinal healing of the soul, the penitent must personally shoulder his or her own burden. The punishment of damnation or spiritual death is not sustained on another’s behalf. Those who are irrecoverable beyond charity cannot derive any benefit from souls existing in charity and within the united Church. Thomas Aquinas also believed that an indulgence “does not take the place of satisfaction as medicinal,”²³⁵ but struggled to address one of the difficulties which seemed to follow. While feeling the force of the argument that indulgences do not avail those who are in mortal sin, he was obliged to admit that in certain forms of indulgence-grant the saints’ merits were applied in a way which might well allow such a sinner to gain some benefit.²³⁶

Thus Aquinas *cum suis* sought to reconcile the two rival economies, secular and sacred; to bridge the gap between human giving and

divine grace, bringing together deficient sinners and superendowed saints in a business transaction which was to the spiritual advantage of the former and the material advantage of those who presumed to manage the immaterial resources of the latter.

Authority and Jurisdiction in the Dispensing of Pardon

But who exactly possessed the awesome power of dispensing such a vast treasury and relieving so much retributive suffering? Where did the requisite authority lie? Did it extend to the ordinary parish priest? The *Alexandri summa* starts its consideration of these issues with a statement of the utterly uncontentious point that every priest possesses the power of the keys.²³⁷ But, can every priest draw on the treasury of the Church? It may be said that every priest has access to the spiritual treasury of his own parish, just as the bishop has of his diocese. Thus it would seem that both priest and bishop can make *relaxationes* from their respective treasuries. But the *Summa* proceeds to refute this hypothesis. Indulgences come from the supererogations of the members of Christ's body and mainly from the supererogatory merits of Christ himself, which constitute the spiritual treasury of the Church. And this treasury is not for all to dispense, but is the prerogative of those who chiefly bear the office of Christ (i.e., the bishops). All bishops can make indulgences and relaxations, and chiefly the *summus pontifex*, the pope. So, concludes the *Summa*, making indulgences is denied not only to layfolk but also to priests and inferior prelates such as abbots and priors. The importance of hierarchy is affirmed—the church hierarchy is disposed in a way which follows the angelic hierarchy, wherein the superiors can do more than the inferiors.

For his part, Albert the Great emphasizes the fact that, while a simple priest has at his disposal the spiritual treasury that comprises the merits of his own parishioners, these are unsufficient—a very substantial treasury is needed for the granting of indulgences.²³⁸ Furthermore, while a simple priest possesses the power of the keys, he does not have the necessary power of jurisdiction. Hence the *plebani* or “lower orders” cannot give indulgences. But what if someone were to say, I myself have seen simple priests giving indulgences without episcopal permission—therefore, why can't a lay person? Albert thinks that this reasoning is flawed. In the first instance, we are dealing with the *pronuntiator* of the indulgences, the mere “announcer” who recommends them in his preaching, rather than the authoritative person who actually makes them. Furthermore, giving indulgences requires jurisdiction in giving, the right to give. A lay person does not have the requisite jurisdiction and therefore he cannot give them.

Aquinas also was concerned to affirm the principle of jurisdiction,

but for him it means locating the authority firmly at the top of the hierarchy: “he alone who is at the head of the Church can grant indulgences.”²³⁹ Thus, “parish priests or abbots or other like prelates” cannot do so, inasmuch as their status and orders neither confer the relevant authority nor bring with them a sufficient treasury of merit. However, Aquinas goes on to affirm the principle of delegation. Subject to the pope’s authority, and not by any authority of their own, bishops can indeed issue indulgences: “they can grant them within fixed limits and not beyond.”²⁴⁰ Furthermore, deacons and others who are not priests can enjoy delegated jurisdiction and thus grant indulgences, even though they lack the power of the keys (which priests do have) and hence lack the power of absolution in the tribunal of penance. More precisely, as Aquinas explains elsewhere, they lack the key of *ordo*, which brings with it sacramental agency.²⁴¹ A priest forgives a fault (*culpa*) through the authority of his ministry “insofar as he confers a sacrament of the forgiveness of sins.” But the making of pardons works on a different principle. An indulgence “is not extended for forgiveness of a fault because it is not something sacramental—it results not from orders but from jurisdiction. For a nonpriest can also grant an indulgence if it is committed to him to do so.”

But does the person who grants an indulgence have to be of good moral standing? What of the “character issue,” which (as has been illustrated above) loomed so large in scholastic discussion of the requisite worthiness of the preacher and of the minister of the sacraments? Albert the Great presents the matter in a quite sensational form by asking if a pope living in mortal sin can give indulgences to those who are living in mortal sin.²⁴² It would seem not, the argument goes, because works performed in mortal sin are dead, and dead works do not vivify. Since indulgences are ordained to vivification and spiritual life, it would appear that such a sinner’s indulgence would not be valid. Furthermore, a river which has no source to feed it cannot flow. But a pope in mortal sin is a river whose source, the Holy Spirit, does not flow, because “a holy and disciplined spirit will flee from deceit” (Wisdom 1:5) and “wisdom will not enter a deceitful soul, or dwell in a body enslaved to sin” (Wisdom 1:4). Therefore it cannot flow to others. Finally, a ray of sun blocked by a cloud does not reach us. St. Dionysius calls the grace of the Holy Spirit a ray, and sin is called a cloud in Isaiah. Thus it may be said that the grace which is hindered by sin is effectively blocked. The indulgence issuing, or which should issue, from a sinful pope is grace intercepted by sin, and so is not valid.

Against these arguments, however, may be posited the idea that prophecy, which may be identified as a divine ray, comes from grace,

which is, so to speak, no respecter of persons. It flowed through Caiaphas, who was “high priest that year,” as says the Evangelist John (11:51): the point being that, by dint of office, a priest has certain powers conferred from above, despite any personal iniquities he may have. Aquinas makes the same point by saying that indulgences are granted by virtue of conferred power, and since mortal sin takes away not power but goodness it does not interfere with their operation.²⁴³ Albert cites Numbers 22, 23, and 24 to the same end: there we read of how a most iniquitous man, Balaam, received a most clear prophecy, which flowed through him to the whole Synagogue and Church. Albert’s conclusion is that indulgences, whether they are given by an evil man or by a good man, are equally valid. They function through grace freely given (*gratia gratis data*), which is a matter of (divine) power, not of goodness of life, and all such gifts flow equally well through good and bad men. Despite his mortal sin, this (hypothetically immoral) pope is sourced by the power of the Holy Spirit. Aquinas sharpens up this argument considerably, by saying that the prelate who, while in a state of mortal sin, grants an indulgence, is not actually pouring forth anything of his own. A man does not lose jurisdiction through sin. “Consequently, indulgences are equally valid, whether they are granted by one who is in mortal sin, or by a most holy person; since he remits punishment, not by virtue of his own merits, but by virtue of the merits laid up in the Church’s treasury.”²⁴⁴

Is an evil bishop able to grant indulgences? That is the form in which the same fundamental issue was raised by Richard of Middleton O.F.M. (c. 1249–c. 1308).²⁴⁵ It would seem not, because no wise lord entrusts anyone who is against him with the power of dispensing from his treasury. The evil bishop is against God, and since God is the wisest lord of all, He should not entrust such a man with that power. On the other hand, absolving in the tribunal of penance is a greater thing than absolving by means of indulgences, which release only from *pena*, not from *culpa*. Since an evil bishop can absolve *in foro poenitentiali*, surely he should be able to issue indulgences? Richard’s answer is that the evil bishop may indeed issue indulgences, for the good reason that he does not make them from his personal merit (*de proprio merito*), which may be diminished by mortal sin, but rather from the treasury of the church, which is unaffected by the bishop’s sin (and, indeed, does not absolve it).²⁴⁶ Thomas of Strasbourg (who read the *Sentences* 1335–37) sums up the fundamental point well by explaining that here we are dealing with “ministerial” action, as when someone dispenses a certain effect *non de suo sed de alieno*; thus a good lord may receive a good gift which is passed on to him by an evil minister. The pope or bishop who gives the indulgence does not issue it *de suo merito* but from the merit of Christ and the saints.²⁴⁷

In all these discussions, we see anti-Donatist arguments which were widely deployed in defending the sacraments of deviant priests now being applied in defending the indulgences of deviant officials who have the requisite authority to issue them. We may have moved from the key of *ordo* to the key of jurisdiction, but the same rationalizations and justifications hold good. The upshot would seem to be that anyone who possesses a genuine indulgence can be confident of its efficacy—providing that he, truly penitent, also plays his part. But can that really be true? If an official steeped in sin can issue an indulgence, surely it can benefit a recipient who is in exactly the same state? If mortal sin isn't repugnant to making indulgences, does it not follow that it isn't repugnant to receiving them? So asks Thomas of Strasbourg, going on to reject this alarming inference with the aid of the imagery of flow and blockage which we already have illustrated from Albert the Great. Just as a dead body-part does not benefit from the life which flows from the other (living) members of the physical body, so mortal sin obstructs a man from receiving the benefits of an indulgence, which issue from the merits of the living head (Christ) and the living members (the saints) of the spiritual body which is the Church.²⁴⁸ That is to say, although a person in mortal sin may materially possess a major indulgence, he is far less disposed to receive its benefits than is the person who is without mortal sin. No remission of punishment can occur if *culpa* remains, as Richard of Middleton succinctly puts it, and since indulgences do not remit the *culpa* of those living in mortal sin, therefore none of their *poena* is remitted either.²⁴⁹

Honoring Becket: The Case for Canterbury

The relentless rationalism, the measured weighing of arguments *pro* and *contra*, of such discussion is in marked contrast to the muddle which faced churchmen in the world beyond the schools. Indulgences were multiplying with alarming frequency; every major shrine, hospital, or church wanted one or more.²⁵⁰ Of particular interest to Chaucerians is the controversy concerning the status of the plenary indulgence associated with the shrine of “the holy blissful martyr,” St. Thomas à Becket, at Canterbury, the objective of Chaucer's pilgrims. A Latin treatise written shortly after the fifth Canterbury Jubilee (1420),²⁵¹ perhaps by Richard Godmersham, argues that the indulgence granted by Honorius III on the occasion of the translation of the martyr (7 July 1220) was indeed a plenary one, valid each successive jubilee year.²⁵² In fact, the evidence for this is very dubious. Godmersham (supposing for the moment that he is indeed the author we are dealing with) assumes that a forged bull of Honorius III (*Quanto venerabilis martyr*) is genuine, but even that document does not

include a clear description of a plenary indulgence, and in any case such grants were still very rare at the beginning of the fourteenth century, when Boniface VIII granted one to those who visited the basilicas of Sts. Peter and Paul. True, in 1216 Honorius III was supposed to have given St. Francis a particularly valuable indulgence in respect of his church of the Portiuncula,²⁵³ and hence that pope might be expected to have shown similar generosity to St. Thomas à Becket's shrine just a few years later. But, once again, the exact terms of the original bequest are a matter of scholarly controversy; the so-called Portiuncula indulgence is almost certainly a later elaboration of what—if anything—Honorius actually had given.²⁵⁴ No trace of such skepticism troubles the surface of Godmersham's treatise: a robust defense of Canterbury's honor is mounted, with the reader's consent being demanded rather than invited.

General principles already familiar to us are applied to the specific case of Becket. His martyrdom acquired many supererogatory merits for the Church, constituting a major contribution to the spiritual treasury. Support for the Canterbury Jubilee is sought in the figures and significations of the Old Testament jubilees. But there is much *ad hoc* argument, which is remarkable for its aggression rather than its logic. Godmersham begins by affirming that the indulgence conceded to Becket's shrine by Honorius III is not inferior to the crusade indulgence, as given by the previous pope, Innocent III.²⁵⁵ Furthermore, the Canterbury indulgence fulfils the conditions of validity laid down by St. Thomas Aquinas in his *Sentences* commentary.²⁵⁶ There it is explained that indulgences are indeed worth what they are said to be worth, providing that he who grants them has the requisite authority, that the recipient has charity, and that, as regards the cause, there is piety which includes the honor of God and the profit of one's neighbor. All these conditions are met by the Canterbury indulgence, Godmersham asserts, and therefore it indeed has the efficacy which preachers profess, and which has been claimed for it on many occasions, five jubilees having elapsed without rejection of the belief that it is genuinely a plenary indulgence. Furthermore, affirmation of the value of this indulgence is a true and healthful thing to do. And since we are not dealing here with a matter of opinion or something which is deniable, it follows that anyone who argues the opposite is not a faithful Christian. Godmersham then goes so far as to say that the Canterbury indulgence derives from the authority of the Church on the same basis as does the Gospel; thus every faithful person should believe in this indulgence just as he believes in the most authoritative books of the Bible.

The plenitude of papal power is then invoked. The pope grants indulgences not *in propria persona* but rather in the person of Christ,

from whom his power derives, as is intimated by the words of St. Paul: "I have pardoned, if I have pardoned any thing, for your sakes have I done it in the person of Christ" (II Corinthians 2:10). The *Glossa ordinaria* on this text explains that Paul's pardons are as valid as if Christ Himself had done the deed. Therefore what Pope Honorius III conceded was given as if Christ had given it; for his part, the pope would not have dispensed this indulgence had not Christ first given His promise prophetically to the blessed martyr. While living in exile in France, Becket experienced a vision in which the Lord Jesus appeared to him and said, "Thomas, Thomas, my Church will be glorified in your blood."²⁵⁷ This is to be understood as a prophetic promise,²⁵⁸ because He who is the sum of truth and cannot lie promised that His Church would be glorified, in the sense that it would be justified and given grace by the plenary remission of sins and the grace and merit mediated by the blood of the blessed martyr. And this is a great glory for the Church Triumphant. Presumably part of the point here is that, through Becket, Christ wished to glorify the Church Triumphant every bit as much as He wished to glorify the Church Militant. If one pope (Innocent III) could grant an indulgence which glorifies the latter, in promoting a crusade, then it seems utterly appropriate that his successor (Honorius III) should have granted an indulgence which glorifies the former.

From all these arguments it is abundantly clear, Godmersham concludes, that Pope Honorius III did not grant the aforesaid indulgence merely from himself alone (*ex se*) but rather from divine inspiration, and he prescribed that it be granted by the universal Church; thus a promise first made by Christ was gloriously implemented by the Pope. Honorius could therefore say with the Apostle Paul, "Yet not I" alone have given or conceded this plenary indulgence of sins, "but the grace of God with me" (cf. I Corinthians 15:10). The truth of the indulgence is therefore clear to all faithful believers—and those who attack it are sinning against the Holy Spirit, concerning which sin Christ inveighs in Matthew 12:32, "it shall not be forgiven him, neither in this world, nor in the world to come." According to the doctors, to attack acknowledged truth is a sin against the Holy Spirit. The Canterbury indulgence is acknowledged truth because it has always been preached as Catholic truth, because it has consistently been authorized by the Church and never revoked, and because the universal Church has selected and made it law. Therefore anyone who attacks it attacks acknowledged truth and sins against the Holy Spirit. Such people have much to fear: the wrath of God will come upon them and they will go down alive to hell (cf. Psalm 77:31 and Numbers 16:30). Godmersham certainly thought of Wyclif's followers in those terms:²⁵⁹ at one point he denounces those who are

“infected with the execrable dogma of the carping Lollards.”²⁶⁰ More generally, here is a treatise which brooks no dissent, the tone of the discussion being very different from that found in the *Sentences* commentaries and *summae* which we have discussed above. Refusal to believe in the Canterbury pardon is not an option, its truth being placed on a par with that of Holy Writ and St. Thomas à Becket being afforded the same honor as God showed to Sts. Peter and Paul.

Maybe Godmersham’s vehemence is a reflex of insecurity. At least the literal truth of the matter was put out of contention by Pope Paul II, who declared unequivocally that a plenary indulgence was on offer during the jubilee year of 1420. One wonders what visitors to Canterbury in the previous jubilee year of 1370 thought they were getting; I see no reason to doubt that they expected a plenary indulgence. Certainly the 1370 jubilee was a highly successful one for the shrine,²⁶¹ a fact which Chaucer may well have been aware of during the gestation of his *Canterbury Tales*. The issue of plenary indulgences apart, Canterbury did very well in respect of pardons of shorter duration, receiving awards from Nicholas IV in 1291, John XXII in 1328, and Boniface IX in 1395. The real-life equivalents of Chaucer’s creations would, one may presume, have returned home well satisfied with their spiritual acquisitions.

But, to be sure, voices were raised in protest against what was becoming an inflationary spiral, fed by the proliferation of indulgences and the increasingly generous terms which they offered—or were supposed to offer.²⁶² The most vociferous protest known to me figures in Simon of Cremona’s *Disputationes de indulgentiis* (c. 1380).²⁶³ Arriving in Cremona from Paris, Simon was astonished to discover that a nearby church was offering on Ascension Day an indulgence *a pena et a culpa*. There was no written evidence that such an indulgence was granted by the papacy—and in any case, Simon says, Rome’s plenary indulgences simply do not go that far. He argues that anyone who absolves *a pena et culpa* incurs instant sentence of excommunication, and that this is an appropriate punishment for anyone who publishes an “indiscreet indulgence”²⁶⁴ which justifies such practice. *Indulgentiae indiscretae* have no papal privilege or any other legal justification to support them; anyone who publicizes them is foolhardy and presumptuous, and sins gravely and mortally: indeed, they are speaking against the Holy Spirit. Simon goes so far as to label those who stubbornly believe and pronounce such a dogma as heretics—for heresy involves two things, an error in reasoning and a stubbornness of will, blatant deviation from the truth (*a veritate deviare*).²⁶⁵

Simon’s adversaries protest that the pope knows full well that Franciscans preach the existence of an indulgence *a pena et a culpa* at

St. Francis's Portiuncula church near Assisi; because the supreme pontif has not said anything against the practice he tacitly is condoning it. Thus a clear precedent exists for the similar claim made concerning the Cremona church of St. John of the Desert. Simon replies that many things are tolerated which, were they subjected to strict legal examination, would not be countenanced. He identifies several ways in which something may be said to be "permitted," the last of which is relevant here: something illicit may be allowed in order to avoid a more serious illegality (thus, adultery may be "permitted" so that murder is avoided). But this most certainly does not mean that the lesser evil is approved in any way. In accordance with this type of "permission," Simon concludes, many things are patiently tolerated. Simon does not spell out what, in the case of the Portiuncula indulgence, the greater evil actually is, but we may assume that he has in mind the scandal that would ensue if the pope were to do anything other than "patiently tolerate" the Franciscan claim. He is, however, anxious to make abundantly clear that the pope is in no way lending his approval or allowing his approval to be assumed. If the pope were to name me "Bishop of Cremona" this would not actually make me the Bishop of Cremona, Simon remarks; due legal process must be observed in making such an appointment. By the same token, when the pope hears about a certain indulgence being offered in Assisi, and is silent, that does not constitute approval of the indulgence, particularly since "the pope says" is a lot more efficacious than "being silent," and the latter is here the case.

Bartholomew of Mainard put forward the dubious argument that a certain kind of deception can have pious advantages: if one were to say, "go to a certain place because you will find a hundred florins and, on going there, the person finds only ten"—well, is that not still a good outcome, albeit not as good as expected? (Here one may recall the arguments relating to the "mother's promise" *exemplum*, as deployed by Albert, Aquinas, and Bonaventure; cf. p. 83 above.) Simon will have none of it. There is no piety here but rather cruel deception; by such practice the authority of the keys of the Church is brought into contempt. You don't make people good by lying to them. Master Dominic O.Carm. opposed Simon with the argument that something which is not prohibited seems to be permissible, inferring that the Assisi indulgence (and presumably the Cremona indulgence also) falls into this category. *Publica fama* does not doubt that such an indulgence is on offer. The logic here is false, Simon retorts; that is the sort of argument the Jews make when they defend usury. On the contrary, such an indulgence is implicitly prohibited everywhere and anywhere, given canon law's warning, with the threat of eternal curse, against its publication (*publicatio*). Only indulgences with impeccable

credentials should be “published”—and those impeccable credentials do not include any reference to absolution *a pena et a culpa*. Dominic’s point about public fame is dismissed with the argument that such fame exists only among those who are deceived and ignorant, and not among people of understanding. Would that it had been so simple. Simon’s own record shows that certain Franciscans were preaching a Portiuncula indulgence *a pena et a culpa*,²⁶⁶ and of course his Franciscan opponents in the three Cremona debates were keen to uphold the honor of their order. Simon’s elitist disdain for the *deceptos et ignorantes* cannot mask the extent of the deception and ignorance concerning indulgences which permeated Western Christendom in his day.

Returning to the English scene, one attempt to keep the terms of indulgences “discreet” and appropriate may be taken as representative. Archbishop John Pecham’s Lambeth conference (1278) decreed that, “since it has been decided that prelates, to whom the mystical treasury is entrusted, should not exceed the number of forty days in conferring indulgences, lest the keys of the Church be condemned,” those who preach or expound those indulgences should do so as accurately as possible, not bringing disgrace on the indulgence-makers by “pouring out in their preachings more indulgences than the bishops do, lest those who are subject to those keys cause them to be held in slight esteem.”²⁶⁷ The fundamental concern here is the appropriate and accurate communication of the scope of a given indulgence, with special reference to the limit of forty days’ remission from purgatorial punishment (as described above, p. 86). William Lyndwood’s fifteenth-century commentary on this canon brings out well the difficulties which could ensue. The indulgence granted by a bishop applies only to those under his jurisdiction. But if an archbishop and his subordinate bishop were both to grant forty days of indulgence, would whoever was under the bishop’s jurisdiction gain eighty days’ release in total (forty from the archbishop and forty from the bishop), whereas a person under a different bishop but under the same provincial would gain only forty days? Lyndwood quotes this as the opinion of Hostiensis (Henry of Segusio; d. 1271), then cites a contrary view—one and the same indulgence cannot exceed forty days, no matter how many people grant it. Furthermore: if all the bishops in a province granted an indulgence, along with their archbishop, it would follow that each of them gave forty days and the archbishop also gave forty days, which would result in anyone in the province having the option of gaining eighty days of indulgence. This, believes Lyndwood, is against the literal understanding of the relevant canon laws. He proceeds to consider the results of *successive* granting of one and the same

indulgence. If the Bishop of London were to grant forty days for a pious work and his successor also granted forty days, the quantity would not be increased but would remain at forty days. If the same bishop granted in succession the same forty-day indulgence for one and the same reason, this is to be seen simply as a renewal of the first indulgence, not as an adjunct to it. All very clear and reasonable, but—in its entirely Lyndwood's disquisition makes it abundantly clear that the room for legal contestation and challenge was vast.²⁶⁸

If the most learned men in the western world could disagree over such matters, what might one expect of lesser mortals, particularly in view of the enormity of the problem? Some indulgences were well worded but confusingly expounded (whether by accident or design); others were incautiously (or unscrupulously) worded. Then there were the forgeries. Were pardons which were fake nevertheless efficacious for those who had received them in good faith? In considering that question, William Lyndwood remarks that a common error may function in the same way as a truth.²⁶⁹ Furthermore, in many articles of the law opinion is preferred to truth, and God judges by intention rather than by works. These arguments are easily demolished with the proposition that truth generally is preferred to opinion, and especially in spiritual matters. If a fake pardon functioned as well as a genuine one, then the recipient would not have been deceived—and it is deception which is at issue here. So, then, Lyndwood believes that such forgeries are not valid. But is a person who buys one of them entitled to get his money back? Maybe, says Lyndwood. On the one hand, if money was extorted through the sale of forged pardons, it should not remain in the hands of the deviant *quaestores* concerned. On the other, if the money has been put to the good use of the Church, then probably the Church should keep it. *Caveat emptor*.

Such confusion was ripe for exploitation—and exploited it was, by learned and lay, by high and low, by popes and pardoners. Our next chapter will consider the modes and mechanisms of exploitation which Chaucer attributes to his Pardoner. Here is a figure who, as I hope to show, far exceeds his authority as a mere announcer or *pronuntiator* of indulgences, in claiming the *officium praedicatoris* and quasi-sacerdotal powers of absolution which had no basis whatever in his letters of appointment. *Pace* the best efforts of the schoolmen, and the compilers of the priests' handbooks who transmitted their determinations, too much of a market was indeed being made of the divine mercy. For Chaucer's character that represented a major business opportunity, which never rises above the level of the material. This mercantile preacher risks eternal damnation through deviancy of a type (and on a scale) which, in my view, goes far beyond the much-discussed matter of his problematic sexuality.

Moral Fallibility

Chaucer's Pardoner and the Office of Preacher

. . . bone predicacion
vient bien de male entencion,
qui n'a riens a celui valu,
tout fac'ele aus autres salu,
car s'il prennent bon exemple,
cil de vaine gloire s'en anple. (5083–88)

[Good preaching may well come from an evil intention; although worth nothing to the preacher, it may bring salvation to others who learn a good example from it while he is so filled with vainglory.]¹

Thus speaks Lady Reason in the part of the *Roman de la Rose* which was composed by Jean de Meun—a scholar writing at the time when university discussion concerning the *officium praedicatoris* and the requisite attributes of priests was at its height. This passage may have been the basic inspiration for Chaucer's conception of his preaching Pardoner:

. . . many a predicacioun
Comth ofte tyme of yvel entencioun (VI(C) 407–8)

But Chaucer's knowledge of the relevant discourses goes far beyond what may be found in the *Rose*. And he exploited them in ways undreamed of by Jean de Meun.

Philosophical warrant and precedent for the Pardoner's position can be found in Aristotle (as quoted in our previous chapter), insofar as Chaucer daringly implements the principle that *ars* and technical/professional knowledge have little or no importance as far as the virtues are concerned, and can exist in profusion where good morality is absent: *ad virtutes autem scire quidem parum aut nihil potest*. It would be harder to find a cleverer bastard than the Pardoner. Particularly galling is the fact that this bastard has a point: he *can* tell a moral tale, and does just that. The in-your-face quality of this performance is astonishing, and unparalleled in medieval literature. But Chaucer's text also offers a reality-check. The Pardoner is a big fish only in a small sociopolitical pond. *Pace* the self-aggrandizing rhetoric in which he indulges, *quaestores* actually occupied a lowly position in the ecclesiastical power-structure. The ways in which Chaucer's character deviates from his licit terms of reference as a pardoner must be considered in some detail, to bring out the nature and extent of his many fallibilities. This inquiry is crucial, since the requirements and

responsibilities of the Pardoner's profession have been occluded in modern criticism, together with the manner in which he exceeds his brief by assuming the priestly duties of preaching and granting absolution. Therefore an essential part of my project is recuperation of the theory and practice of indulgences and the official terms of reference of those who issued or "made" them and those who dispensed them. In light of this evidence, we may reconsider the vexed topic of the Pardoner's sexuality, to investigate the ways in which this can be seen as deviant, and the extent to which this matters within the ethical economy of the *Pardoner's Prologue and Tale*.

I. ALMS AND THE MAN: THE DEVIANT PARDONER

Chaucer's Pardoner claims to possess an impressive (incredible?) amount of documentation, including "Bulles of popes and of cardynales, / Of patriarkes and bishopes" (VI (C) 342–43).² One seems to be of special importance. Before he begins to preach, he will display "Oure lige lordes seel on my patente" (337), so that no man, whether priest or clerk, should disturb him in his work. This almost certainly refers to some kind of royal license permitting the Pardoner to ply his trade. The Pardoner in John Heywood's *Pardoner and the Frere* (published in 1533) also has a "patent" bearing "our lyege lorde seale" (99)—the influence of Chaucer's line is evident—which later is described in more detail. If you "dysturbe me any thyng," the Pardoner threatens the Friar, you will be

. . . a traytour to the kynge;
For here hath he graunted me, under hys brode seale,
That no man, yf he love hys hele,
Sholde me dysturbe or let in any wyse.
And yf thou dost the kynges commaundement dispeie,
I shall make the be set fast by the fete! (270–76)³

Heywood's editors identify the "brode seale" with the Great Seal of Westminster, but we cannot know if the dramatist thought that Chaucer's Pardoner also had such a document.⁴ What does seem quite clear is that both authors envisaged the real-life models of their characters as needing both secular and spiritual authorization. Chaucer's figure is specifically identified as a pardoner "of Rouncivale" (I(A) 670), i.e., he is raising funds for the hospital of the Blessed Mary of Rouncival, Charing Cross. It seems improbable that, in real life, this hospital would have given each and every one of its (very numerous) *quaestores* an actual patent roll, bearing the royal seal, multiple copies having been obtained from the crown. It seems more likely—certainly this would have been a lot cheaper—for the hospital to have kept an original document and handed out notarized

copies to its agents.⁵ But of course, Chaucer may have engaged in some poetic exaggeration here, since he was seeking to contrast the Pardoner's grand documentation with his shabby activities.

Turning now to the matter of his spiritual credentials: the Pardoner's documentation would probably have included a copy made from the master papal license held in his London hospital. However, there is no reference to such a thing in Chaucer's text. What is mentioned is the Pardoner's collection of "bulles," these being the documents which announce and describe the indulgences he will dispense as his clients give alms to one or more of the various charitable causes for which he is collecting. I speak of "various" causes advisedly, since the Pardoner's horizons seem to extend beyond Charing Cross. In the General Prologue he is said to have returned recently "fro the court [i.e., the papal court] of Rome" (I(A) 671, cf. 687), and near the end of his tale he claims—with typical hyperbole—to have been given "reliques and pardoun . . . by the popes hond" (VI(C) 920–22). These claims are (to some extent) supported by the "vernycle" badge sewn on his cap, evidence of a visit to one of the main attractions of St. Peter's, the relic of a cloth bearing the image of Christ's face.⁶ The Pardoner certainly did not have to go to Rome to acquire any documentation relating to his work for the Rouncival hospital. It would seem, then, that he is dispensing indulgences for other organizations and enterprises, for there is nothing to suggest that Chaucer (or at least "Chaucer" the narrator) is casting doubt on his character's Roman sojourn. Here, then, is a larger-than-life, composite figure, with several types of *quaestor* being rolled into one. Just as Chaucer's Knight is a veteran of an extraordinary—indeed, impossibly—large number of battles, so the Pardoner proudly displays his profession's equivalent of "campaign ribbons," in some profusion. "Ne was ther swich another pardoner" (I(A) 693): he is the extreme test-case of his trade, the best and the worst of his kind—and the emphasis falls heavily, of course, on "the worst."

Precisely what form did the Rouncival indulgences take? In the late fourteenth century there was a significant change of practice, whereby certain indulgences—instead of being issued on the basis of papal (or episcopal) grants directly associated with the church or hospital in question—fell within the purview of authorized confraternities which offered collective indulgences to their members, along with the right to choose their own confessors.⁷ Chaucer's Pardoner might therefore be distributing confraternity letters, with the associated papally granted privileges (including indulgences), rather than collecting specifically on the basis of the indulgences hitherto granted to Rouncival itself (although these were subsumed in the privileges). This seems eminently plausible, although in my view it is

impossible to limit the Pardoner's stock-in-trade to one particular type of pardon, given the all-inclusive nature of this representative figure.⁸ All of this directly bears on one particular crux in the *Pardoner's Tale*, the passage where Chaucer's character promises to "entre" the names of those who donate alms "in my rolle anon" (VI(C) 911). This could be a tally of the people who have donated alms,⁹ and hence been issued with individual indulgences by the Pardoner. Alternatively, the Pardoner could be recording their names for fraternity membership, one of the benefits of which was participation in such an organization's collective indulgence. I think the latter is the more likely explanation.

Parallels may be found in other English writings. The Pardoner described at *Piers Plowman*, B Prol. 68–75, seems to be peddling fraternity membership; each client is tapped on the head with his "brevet" (bull) as a sign that he or she has been admitted. Even more explicitly, his equivalent in Heywood's *Pardoner and the Frere* lists the benefits of membership of the "fraternitie" for which he works (467, cf. 487), which include substantial burial rights—a well-arrayed "herse" surrounded by "torches and tapers" burning brightly, with bells solemnly ringing "and prestes and clerkes devoutly syngynge" (469–75). A parody "roll" is read aloud by the pardoner-figure in the anonymous "ship of fools" poem entitled *Cocke Lorrelles Boat* (printed by Wynkyn de Worde, perhaps in 1510).¹⁰

The pardoner sayd I wyll rede my roll
And ye shal here the names poll by poll
Therof of ye nede not fere.
Here is fyrst Cocke Lorell the knyght
And symkyn emery mayntenaunce agayne ryght
With slyngethryfte fleshemonger. . .

A list of stereotypes familiar from estates satire follows. Cocke Lorrell then demands that the pardoner should tell him

What profyte is to take thy pardon.
Shewe vs what mede is to come
To be in this fraternyte.

"This pardon is new founde," comes the answer, established beside London Bridge in the stews, where men offer "manye a franke" to certain "relygyous women" who are "kynde and lyberall"! The text proceeds to parody the burial rights which fraternities commonly offered. When "ony brother" dies, dogs shall carry him to church, and the corpse shall be covered with a pall made of old blue stockings, recently come from Rome.

Such a broad *reductio ad absurdum* is, of course, some distance away from the tone and tenor of the *Pardoner's Prologue and Tale*, but its humor may encourage a more skeptical approach to the status of

Chaucer's character *qua* pardoner. Thus far, we have been giving this figure the benefit of the doubt. It may now be admitted that at least some of his credentials are questionable (or, rather, the credentials of at least one of the types of pardoner he is embodying are questionable). There is historical evidence aplenty to indicate that certain "false pardoners" simply pretended to have been licensed by the pope or his officials for their own unscrupulous purposes, in order to extort money for themselves. Hence the Fourth Lateran Council of 1215 sought to forbid certain *quaestores* who, "misrepresenting themselves (*se alios mentiendo*), preach certain abuses," from being admitted to advertise their indulgences "unless they exhibit genuine letters either of the Apostolic See or of the diocesan bishop."¹¹ Given that Chaucer's Pardoner has his "lige lordes seel" to display, he might be deemed innocent of that accusation.¹² Against that, however, is the fact that during the 1380s warrants were issued to arrest persons mendaciously claiming to be collecting alms for the Rounceval Hospital.¹³ Chaucer makes no definite pronouncement on this matter, but the dubious elements in the Pardoner's portrait certainly add up and are utterly consistent: supposed to be working for the hospital particularly associated with abuses of the system of selling pardons; possessing a suspiciously large number of documents (are some, or indeed all, fakes?) and patently unauthentic relics; of strange—apparently feminoid—appearance¹⁴ and unscrupulous character; claiming powers which far exceed his authority and terms of reference; exploiting his position (whether real or assumed) for personal profit. All in all, a character who is either guilty, or with good reason suspected, of a wide and quite appalling range of moral shortcomings.

It is utterly clear, I believe, that his activities betray and bring into disrepute his supposed profession as *quaestor*, fundraiser for charitable causes. Given the bad press which indulgences have received, particularly from scholars with Protestant leanings (whose legacy has lingered long in Chaucer criticism),¹⁵ the claim that pardoning had any merit to be devalued in the first place may seem a surprising one to make. But it is high time, I believe, that we recuperated the idealism which marks the foundational theology of indulgences, its affirmation of divine love and expression of religious communality and mutuality. St. Bonaventure is an eloquent witness among many others who saw in indulgences an endorsement of the recommendation of Galatians 5:2 to "bear one another's burdens." Taking these "burdens" as spiritual burdens, Bonaventure suggests that, if a heavy penance is imposed on someone, it is quite possible for someone else to "bear it for him in part or in whole."¹⁶ A comparison is offered with what happens in nature. In the case of the animal

body, one member may expose itself to mitigate the hurt which threatens another member, as when the arm seeks to shield the head. Assuming “there is a connection and likeness between the mystical body and the natural body, it seems that one member can and should bear the burdens of the other.” A comparison with human conduct is also offered. A creditor does not care who pays what he is owed, whether the debtor himself or someone else; indeed, “he accepts payment for the same from either.” Likewise God, being at once “more indulgent and yet more eager to receive payment than a man of this world,” is content to have one person make satisfaction for another. Finally, Christ “was punished and by His punishment he made satisfaction”—not, of course, for His own sin, but for another’s. Thus, Christ rendered satisfaction for us all. Since “we are all one in Christ and are His members, we ought also to be imitators of Him.” Following His example, then, one individual can and should render satisfaction for another. For all these reasons, Bonaventure concludes, it is quite reasonable for a penalty to be commuted to another person, the debt of punishment thereby being paid. Here, then, is a humane—and quite moving, in my view—rationale for the dispensation of merit from the *thesaurus mysticus*, that vast repository of spiritual wealth which may be distributed in relation to the needs and capabilities of all its beneficiaries, whether they be rich or poor in material terms. This doctrine implicates a solidarity which is at once natural, human, and divine, an inclusiveness which derives from our shared membership of the savior’s mystical body.

Such lofty sentiments are quite lost on Chaucer’s Pardoner, who feels no bond with his victims:

I wol have moneie, wolle, chese, and whete,
Al were it yeven of the povereste page,
Or of the povereste wydwe in a village,
Al sholde hir children sterve for famyne. (VI(C) 448–51)

Bonaventure had seen indulgences as a leveling device which brought their recipients together in terms of the value of the spiritual benefits received, despite any differences in material wealth: the conferral of a pardon was not a purchase, but rather an exercise of the Church’s liberality. He had applied the metaphor of how a rich man, going to a tavern, receives the same wine as does a poor old woman, in making the point that the pardon is worth the same to both; in discussing the same issues Aquinas had noted that the worth of a pardon was not related to a person’s ability to pay for it (cf. pp. 84–85 above). In the Pardoner’s view, however, that *vetula paupercula* is a professional challenge—a sort of acid test of his powers of persuasion. The more straitened her circumstances, the higher the stakes and the greater his pleasure in success. Here is no compassion, no recognition of human

mutuality or Christian solidarity.¹⁷

So rapacious is the Pardoner's greed that it has become a driving force which is no respecter of persons: indeed, the amount of money he gains seems less important than the pleasure he takes in exacting it. He is rather reminiscent of the greedy merchant castigated in the *Roman de la Rose* immediately before the critique of the immoral preacher with which this chapter opened: here is a man whose passion for acquiring the property of others is like trying to drink the Seine dry—he “will never be able to do it, because there will always be some left.” The more he has the more he wants, and the more he longs for what he lacks; thus an “agonizing conflict tears at his vitals and tortures him” (*Rose*, 5049–59). Something of that obsessiveness has gone into Chaucer's character.

The Pardoner cares nothing for the model of apostolic poverty (“I wol noon of the apostles countrefete”; 447), in blatant opposition to those many theologians who affirmed that, whereas other classes of men “are obliged to worry about the necessities of life,” preachers must not be anxious about what they eat, drink, or wear, since their Father will look after their needs for such things (cf. Matthew 6:31–32).¹⁸ Expounding and elaborating on this passage, Humbert of Romans advises preachers to “Consider the birds of the air: they do not sow or reap or gather into barns” and “Consider the lilies of the field, see how they grow! They do not work or spin. But I say to you that not even Solomon in all his glory was clothed like one of them” (Matthew 6:26–29). Men should not have any doubt that God will do the same for them, given that they “are worth more in his sight” than such creatures are. St. Gregory the Great is quoted as saying that “the preacher ought to have such confidence in God that, although he himself makes no provision at all for his own support in his present life, he knows for sure that he is not without such support. In this way his mind will not be occupied with temporal affairs, and he will be free to devote himself to making provision for the eternal good of others.”¹⁹ Furthermore, Humbert continues, Christ Himself gave evident proof of this when he sent out his disciples to preach “without any bag or wallet and without shoes”—and they lacked nothing (cf. Luke 22:35). Humbert is writing as a Dominican friar, of course, but such sentiments were deemed appropriate to the secular priesthood as well. Hence Thomas of Chobham can remark that the goods of clerics are the goods of paupers, since clerics should distribute their goods to the poor, apart from what they need to reserve for themselves, avoiding superfluity.²⁰

Clearly, Chaucer's Pardoner is obsessed with making provision “for his own support in his present life” and deeply disinterested in the eternal good of others. “Those who are sent to collect alms must be

moderate and discreet,” declares the sixty-second canon of the Fourth Lateran Council. But this character is neither. The Lateran Fathers had added that *quaestores* should not “take lodging in taverns or other disreputable hostels,” nor run up large bills.²¹ The Spanish canonist Raymond of Peñafort O.P. (1185–1275) complained of how pardoners go from church to church with their letters of remission, preaching abuses and spending their time carousing and drinking.²² Now, whether Chaucer’s character intends to overindulge (or actually is overindulging as he tells his tale) in the hostelry referred to in VI(C) 321,²³ his tale-telling certainly raises the specter of the tavern as the devil’s church (cf. 469–70),²⁴ of which the Pardoner himself is a keen member. And some of the money he spends on his personal entertainment comes, it is evident, from sources which could ill afford to lose it. Almsgiving was supposed to provide sustenance for the poor, but the Pardoner has moved far from the traditional justification for almsgiving—indeed he has inverted it, by making himself the material beneficiary of his trade in indulgences.

More specifically, he has perverted the traditional justification of preaching *pro questu*, as may be illustrated with reference to Thomas of Chobham’s treatment of the question, does a preacher sin mortally in preaching for alms?²⁵ It would seem so, Chobham postulates, because preaching is spiritual work, and it is not licit to use spiritual work to acquire temporal reward; Scripture frequently condemns those preachers who “seek the things that are their own: not the things that are Jesus Christ’s” (Philippians 2:21). On the other hand, St. Paul declares that by all means Christ may be preached, and he rejoiced and will rejoice in this (Philippians 1:18).²⁶ Furthermore, the Lord affirms that the laborer is worthy of his hire (Luke 10:7). Besides, if it was forbidden to preach to acquire gifts, a lot of churches would be in trouble—for in time of necessity they have sent out their preachers to obtain alms from the faithful. Chobham seeks to resolve this problem by arguing that the obtaining of temporal reward is not the final cause as such but rather the consequence of the actual final cause, which is devotion. Devotion is the preacher’s true motivation in preaching; from this quite impeccable final cause follows the collection of alms and the advantage of the church. The preacher must preach to excite the devotion of the faithful, Chobham explains, but because devotion cannot be proved better than by making offerings and donating gifts, a good man’s preaching *pro questu* may be justified because he is preaching on account of devotion, from which temporal reward follows. Therefore, when one speaks of preaching “for” (*pro*) alms, that “for” does not indicate the final cause itself, but rather the consequence of the final cause—because the devotion of the faithful is the final cause of the preaching, from which follow almsgiving and the

advancement of the Church. If someone preaches in order to collect alms for the renewal of the Church or the construction of bridges or the maintenance of the poor, the principal intention (*principalis intentio*) must be that the hearts of the faithful are stirred to devotion, while the secondary intention may be that the faithful are seen offering and giving alms on account of this preaching, because such behavior affords clear evidence that the hearts of the faithful have been excited appropriately.

That noble *principalis intentio* is flagrantly violated in the Pardoner's Prologue and Tale.²⁷ But the Pardoner's deviancy *qua* pardoner goes far beyond the mere confusion of final causes in preaching *pro questu*, however reprehensible that in itself may be. For he far exceeds the statutory obligations and authorized duties of a licensed dispenser of indulgences in two crucial—and quite damning—ways, in claiming extensive powers of absolution and the full *officium praedicatoris*, as I now hope to show, beginning with Chaucer's deployment of theological discourses relating to absolution in the presentation of this "noble ecclesiaste."

The Pardoner's arrogation of the power of absolving people from sin, "by the auctoritee / Which that by bulle ygraunted was to me" (V1(C) 387–88), is quite shocking. Naturally, he fails to clarify either his own subordinate position or the limited role which, according to the official theology, indulgences were to play within the economy of salvation. In the first instance, *quaestores* were only *pronuntiatores* (to use Albert the Great's term) of indulgences, the mere "announcers" who "published" and recommended them in their preaching (cf. above, p. 88). Turning to the indulgences themselves, they were supposed to reduce or remove completely only the temporal²⁸ punishment (or *poena*) for sin which remains after the sacrament of confession and absolution, as administered by a priest, has removed the moral guilt (or *culpa*). Indulgences were granted on the major condition that the recipients were genuinely contrite and had made, or were going to make, proper confession and appropriate satisfaction, this being a common formula in medieval publication of pardons (as explained in our previous chapter). To take one representative English example, the indulgence which John Trillek, Bishop of Hereford (from 1344 through 1360), granted when he consecrated altars at Vowchurch, accorded forty days of indulgence to all legally appropriate persons "who, *truly sorry for their sins, penitent and confessed*," visited the church on each of certain designated saints' days, or made some charitable contribution toward its upkeep or embellishment.²⁹ Now, pardons do not benefit "those who are in mortal sin, and consequently, true contrition and confession are demanded as conditions for gaining all indulgences" (as Aquinas

said).³⁰ While it is true that Chaucer's Pardoner does go through the motions of warning that only those free from the "blame" of unshriven sin may offer to his relics and be absolved by his bulls (377–84), the main point behind that statement is reassurance of the Canterbury pilgrims that no-one among them should let any feelings of shame hinder them from offering—once again, self-interest is paramount, his ambition being to collect as much money as possible.³¹ The emphasis is consistently placed on his own (utterly dubious) importance in the process of absolution.

This becomes even more blatant at the end of his tale, when the Pardoner goes so far as to declare that he has the power to absolve his clients—those who "offre" or donate alms—so cleanly and purely that they shall enter heaven without hindrance:

I yow assoille, by myn heigh power,
Yow that wol offre, as clene and eek as cleer
As ye were born. . . (913–15)

It is an honour to everich that is heer
That ye mowe have a suffisant pardoneer
T'assoille yow in contree as ye ryde,
For aventures whiche that may bityde. (931–94)

Looke which a seuretee is it to yow alle
That I am in youre felaweshipe yfalle,
That may assoille yow, bothe moore and lasse,
Whan that the soule shal fro the body passe. (937–40)

In fact, the worth of indulgences were deemed to owe nothing whatever to the moral qualities of their mere "publisher"/dispenser (or indeed of the eminent authority-figure who actually made the indulgences, as has been made clear in our previous chapter); to argue otherwise would be to countenance something rather like Wycliffite *dominium* theory, or even Donatism.³² By the same token, the immoral character of the preacher was not supposed to devalue the divine words he preached, and when Walter Brut dared to suggest that a good layman or lay woman was more worthy to confect the Eucharist than an immoral priest, the vigorous response was that consecration *non est actus personalis sed dei tantum*—hence it is neither promoted by the goodness of the minister nor impeded by his wickedness.³³ Any "heigh power" of absolution possessed by an indulgence derived from the pardon itself and not from the pardoner.

In marked contrast to the Pardoner's formulations is the following statement from the Alliterative *Morte Arthure* (a text variously dated c. 1440 and shortly before 1400), which clearly specifies where the true power and authority lie. Sir Craddok vows that he

. . . will pass in pilgrimage this pas to Rome
To purchase me pardon of the Pope selven,

A pardon from the pope himself cannot be anything other than genuine— but, more importantly for our purpose here, Craddock seems fully aware that it is the pardon itself (clearly a plenary indulgence) which will “assoil” him from the pains of purgatory.

“I assoille him,” “I yow assoille,” “I am in youre felaweshipe . . .”: in addition to placing that theologically incorrect emphasis on the “I,” Chaucer manipulates different meanings of “assoille.” The crucial distinction to be drawn here is between “judiciary” absolution and “penitential” absolution. As Pierre Bersuire O.S.B. (d. 1362) succinctly put it, “Duplex est igitur absolutio, secundum quod est duplex forus”: there are two kinds of absolution inasmuch as there are two kinds of court or tribunal.³⁵ That is to say, *absolutio* can have the sense of “release or dismissal,” as used to describe (for example) discharge from office, or release from obligation or debt in a secular legal sense. Moreover, one may speak of pardons as “absolving” insofar as they release their possessor from the debt of sin and hence its punishment. This is the meaning borne by the term “assoiled” in the *Morte Arthure* passage quoted above. It may also be found in William Lyndwood’s account of how Christ’s supererogatory merit contributed hugely to the *thesaurus mysticus*: the smallest drop of his blood, he explains, is sufficient for the absolution (*absolutio*) of our sins.³⁶

But in such statements *absolutio* does not, of course, carry the specific, technical sense of “the formal act of a priest or bishop pronouncing the forgiveness of sins by Christ to penitent sinners” (to quote the definition of penitential absolution from the *Oxford Dictionary of the Christian Church*).³⁷ Only a properly ordained priest can “absolve” *in foro pœnitentiali*, judge a sinner’s contrition and grant him absolution. And *only then* can his indulgence actually work, its own specific release or *absolutio*—just from *poena*—take effect. As that most popular of all Middle English poems, *The Pricke of Conscience* (c. 1350), succinctly puts it,

. . . pardon of papes and bisschopes,
 þat es granted here als men hopes,
 May availe þair saules in purgatory,
 þat has purchaced it here worthyly,
 If þai of þair syn had contricion
 And war shrifen byfor þat pardon,
 þan may pardon after þair dede
 In purgatory þam stand in stede. (IV.3804–11)³⁸

To think otherwise is to blur together the very different powers of the two keys, of jurisdiction and of *ordo*. The separation of the powers conferred by holy orders from those conferred by jurisdiction—expressed by reference to the two keys which Christ gave to St. Peter and his successors— was widely accepted, as our previous chapter has

indicated. Lyndwood's *Provinciale*, following Aquinas and Hostiensis (Henry of Segusio, d. 1271), explains that the effect of the key of jurisdiction is the remission of sin, which is achieved through indulgences, for this remission does not appertain to the dispensation of the sacraments but to the dispensation of the common goods of the Church; and therefore legates, although not priests, can make (*facere*) indulgences.³⁹ For absolution in the tribunal of penance, holy orders are necessary—and here the key of ministry is in operation, which entails the power of binding and loosing. This is the only means by which the moral guilt (or *culpa*) is removed.

However, Chaucer's Pardoner attempts to dispense with this vital transaction between priest and penitent, apparently offering a one-stop service: obtain an indulgence from him (following the donation of alms), and nothing else is required; into the bliss of heaven you shall go, absolved "as clene and eek as cleer / As ye were born" (914–95). There is confusion here— a deliberate ploy, perhaps, on the Pardoner's part—between the two senses of absolution, "judicial" absolution and "penitential" absolution, that which may be gained through an indulgence and that which must be gained through confession to a priest.⁴⁰ Particularly telling is the Pardoner's use of the phrase "I yow assoille," a clear echo of the priestly formula of indicative absolution, "Ego te absolvo." Yet again, Chaucer may be indicating how far the Pardoner has trespassed into the territory traditionally reserved for the priest. It may be recalled how English bishops fulminated about how *quaestores* were casually absolving from all kinds of heinous sin, including usury, robbery, perjury, and even murder.⁴¹ Two charges are interwoven here: such individuals are on the one hand assuming a role to which they have no legal right, and on the other they are exercising that role in a quite outrageous way, lacking measure, distinction, or any sense of scale. Chaucer's character may be guilty on both those counts.

In other words, the Pardoner may be claiming (however obliquely) the power to absolve not only *a poena* but also *a culpa*, from guilt as well as punishment—a practice all too common among English pardoners of the time, according to the statement in the Oxford petition of 1414 which attacks pardoners who, "although not in holy orders, preach publicly and pretend falsely that they have full powers of absolving both from punishment and from guilt (*a poena et a culpa*), along with other blasphemies, by means of which they plunder and seduce the people."⁴² However, the extent and level of deliberate fraud or simple misunderstanding, and hence the degree of confusion, was even more endemic than that. Since this matter has already been discussed in our previous chapter, one example from Chaucer's time may suffice here, concerning Urban VI's authorization of the (quite

disastrous) “crusade” which Henry Despenser, Bishop of Norwich, mounted against Clement the Antipope in 1383. The *forma absolutionis* included in the papal documentation makes it clear that participants were to be granted a plenary indulgence (“ab omnibus peccatis tuis”), the necessity of confession and contrition being emphasized (“ore confessionis et corde contritis”).⁴³ Here I quote from Thomas Walsingham’s *Historia anglicana*. However, in Henry Knighton’s chronicle this same indulgence is described as offering absolution from both punishment and guilt (“a poena et culpa absolvebat”).⁴⁴ The latter opinion seems to have been a widely held one; it reappears in a Wycliffite sermon which complains about the claim of Urban’s followers “to han power of Crist to assoille alle men that helpen in her cause, for to gete this worldli worshiþe to assoille men of *peyne and synne* bothe in this world and in the tothir.”⁴⁵ The Lollard writer is assuming that such absolution from both punishment and guilt is a doctrine held and promoted in all seriousness by the establishment, and as such is an appropriate object of his wrath. After all, there was a widespread—though of course mistaken—belief that plenary indulgences offered absolution *a pena et a culpa*.⁴⁶ That belief was by no means confined to the uneducated, despite the attempts of certain members of the establishment to place the blame there.⁴⁷

Hence it would be very risky indeed to suggest that in Chaucer’s day the Pardoner’s arrogation of powers of absolution (which may include the implication that he can absolve *a poena et a culpa*) was taken seriously only by the most ignorant and vulnerable members of society. Given the cacophony of competing voices in the period, many having at least the semblance of authority, literary criticism should refrain from rushing in where angels feared to tread. All this having been said, however, it is reasonable to conclude that the less well educated, and the poor, were more vulnerable to moral monstrosities like Chaucer’s Pardoner. The poet himself seems convinced that it is the “lewed peple” (437) who are habitually plundered and seduced by members of his unfraternal brotherhood.⁴⁸ Langland thought likewise, and paints a picture of how “lewed men leved” an avaricious pardoner for his extravagant promises of absolution—“Of falshede of fastynge, of avowes ybroken”—and “Comen up knelynge to kissen his bulle” (*Piers Plowman*, Prol. 70–73).

Continuing our inquiry into the claims made by Chaucer’s Pardoner for his powers of absolution, it may now be asked: when he says that, thanks to his ministrations, someone’s soul will go to heaven, fully absolved, after death (911–15), does this mean that he is dispensing plenary indulgences as correctly understood, i.e., documents which signal release from all the punishment (*poena*) due for sin, though not from the *culpa* (that being a misunderstanding, as

already noted)? The Pardoner could well have plenary indulgences in his possession (whether obtained in England or abroad). But even if this were so, he would still be guilty of exaggeration and misrepresentation, since the benefits which ensue from such pardons cannot, of course, be obtained simply by making a charitable donation and being entered into the Pardoner's "roll." The element of exaggeration is even greater in Heywood's presentation of an unscrupulous pardoner in *The Foure PP*—

Give me but a peny or two pens
And, as sone as the soule departeth hens,
In halfe an houre or thre quarters at moste
The soule is in heven with the Holy Ghost (147–50)

—but obviously comparable with Chaucer's. The crucial point is that possession of pardons—even plenary pardons, correctly issued and understood—does not make one exempt from divine punishment, as William Lyndwood (among many others) makes perfectly clear. People should beware of neglecting good works in the future simply because they possess indulgences, Lyndwood declares.⁴⁹ They may think themselves immune, but they can still be "bound" or convicted on the charges of negligence and contempt. Satisfaction has to be made properly, penitence which has been enjoined must be performed. Very similar views are expressed at the end of Passus VII (B-text, 174–95), where the dreamer declares that while the efficacy of pardons must be believed ("This is a leef of our bileve"), nevertheless at the day of judgment trust in such things "is noght so siker [sure] for the soule . . . as is Dowel." "A pokeful [bagful] of pardon," "indulgences doublefold," and membership in all the fraternities of friars⁵⁰ may be rated as worth a mere piecrust if Dowel does not help you, if your good works are insufficient.

No doubt Chaucer's Canterbury pilgrims expect to gain substantial indulgences after visiting the shrine of St. Thomas à Becket and performing the necessary rituals—and that is precisely the point. A certain amount of good work is involved; specific requirements must be met. There is no way in which the penitential procedure can be short-circuited, and the Pardoner is sinning gravely by claiming otherwise. Indeed, his performance may be seen as a travesty of the entire process in which the pilgrims are engaged, striking at the very heart of their religious observances—a point which gains more force from his display and exploitation of relics which Chaucer identifies as fraudulent. At the beginning of the Lateran canon (no. 62) which stipulates measures for policing the activities of *quaestores* is found an attack on those who "expose for sale⁵¹ and exhibit promiscuously the relics of the saints," to the great injury of the Christian religion.⁵² In an attempt to stop this happening, it is decreed that "old relics may

not be exhibited outside of a vessel or exposed for sale. And let no one presume to venerate publicly new ones unless they have been approved by the Roman pontiff.” In future, prelates must not allow those who come to their churches, wishing to venerate relics, to be “deceived by worthless fabrications or false documents as has been done in many places for the sake of gain.” Fine words—but Chaucer’s Pardoner is able to ply his fraudulent trade unchecked. His worthless fabrications stand in marked contrast to the genuine relics of St. Thomas at Canterbury, the ultimate destination of all Chaucer’s tale-tellers.

What, then, of his preaching; may that also be regarded as fraudulent in some way? Chaucer strongly hints that the Pardoner has usurped an office to which he has no legal entitlement:

I stonde *lyk a clerk* in my pulpet,
And whan the lewed peple is doun yset,
I preche so as ye han herd bifoore,
And telle an hundred false japes moore. (VI(C) 391–94. Italics mine)

Quaestores did not possess the *officium praedicatoris* by virtue of their occupation. As the sixty-second Lateran canon puts it, “they may not preach anything to the people but what is contained” in the letters which they had obtained from either the Apostolic See or the diocesan bishop.⁵³ In similar vein, William Lyndwood declares that the office of preaching does not pertain to such people; their authority extends only to asking for charitable help and expounding (the verb used is *exponere*, meaning to set forth or “publish”) any indulgence they may have.⁵⁴ In other words, pardoners were supposed to explain the nature of their indulgence, its importance, and the reasons for its making. This activity could easily be regarded as, or mistaken for, or shade into, “preaching.” No “sermon” (if such it may be called) which may specifically be identified as a pardoner’s seems to have survived, but there are references aplenty to the preaching activities of pardoners. What is meant here? The pardoners’ exposition of the terms of their indulgences, and/or “preaching” or moral admonition which arose naturally out of such exposition? Some light may be thrown on the problem by John Heywood’s lively dramatization of a confrontation between a pardoner and a friar:

FRERE: Date et dabitur vobis

Good devout people, this place of scrypture

PARDONER: Worshypfull maysters, ye shall understand

FRERE: Is to you that have no litterature—

PARDONER: That Pope Leo the tenth hath granted with his hand,

FRERE: Is to say in our englysshe tonge—

PARDONER: And by his bulles confyrmed under lede,

FRERE: As “departe your goodes the poorefolke amonge”

PARDONER: To all maner people, bothe quycke and dede,

FRERE: And God shall than gyve unto you agayne:
 PARDONER: Ten thousande yeres and as many lentes of pardon
 FRERE: This in the gospell so is wryten playne.
 PARDONER: Whan they are dede, theyr soules for to guardon,
 FRERE: Therfore gyve your almes in the largest wyse,
 PARDONER: That wyll with theyr peny or almes dede
 FRERE: Kepe not your goodes—fye, fye on covetyse!
 (*The Pardoner and the Frere*, 189–204)

These two rapacious characters are competing to win alms from their audience, the one refusing to give way to the other; thus the situation degenerates into a shouting match. But their scripts are very different. The Friar proceeds to expound the *thema* or opening text of his sermon, “Give and it shall be given unto you” (Luke 6:38), whereas the Pardoner gives an account of the bull—by Pope Leo X, whose indulgences were attacked by Luther—which authorized the pardons he has on offer. Chaucer’s Pardoner sounds more like Heywood’s Friar than Heywood’s Pardoner. The implication would seem to be that Chaucer’s figure—perhaps like many of his real-life models—is exceeding his very limited authority as “publisher” and dispenser of indulgences.

It must be acknowledged that terms relating to preaching—both in Latin and *in vulgari*—could be used in loose, nontechnical senses.⁵⁵ Several good examples may be found in the *Wife of Bath’s Prologue*, where Jenkyn is said to “preche” to Alisoun from his book of wicked wives (III (D) 641), and her old husbands are accused—quite unfairly—of preaching to her about the wiles of women (247, 366, 436–37). But in his prologue Chaucer’s Pardoner claims the right and the wherewithal to preach in the full professional and technical sense of the term; indeed, this text reads as a cathena of passages from the *artes praedicandi* (duly subverted by the Pardoner, to be sure).⁵⁶ It is indubitable that he is being presented, first and foremost, as a preacher—and there is no way in which we may mute the question, should he be preaching in the full, official sense of the term which Chaucer’s text presumes? The answer, I believe, lies in that crucial line, “I stonde lyk a clerk in my pulpet”—which intimates that he is not a “clerk” and hence is an inappropriate occupant of that “pulpit.”⁵⁷ Similarly, in the prologue to *Piers Plowman* Langland attacks a pardoner who preaches “as he a preest were” (68). Although he, like Chaucer’s Pardoner, can produce a document of authorization (bearing “bissopes seles”), it is evident that his credentials do not justify all the activities in which he is engaged. Furthermore, Langland’s point is not only that this pardoner lacks the right to do what he is doing but also that he is morally unsuited for the task, due to his avaricious nature. Chaucer’s Pardoner appears to have been cut from the same cloth.

If, then, it be accepted that the Pardoner's profession *per se* does not authorize him to absolve or to preach in the ways he himself defines, the further question presents itself, could at least some aspects of this authority derive from another source—because, quite independently of his status as pardoner, he is also an ordained priest, maybe even a friar, particularly in view of the fact that friars often preached indulgences?⁵⁸ The case for the Pardoner being a friar is insupportable. There is no reason whatever to suppose that his “cappe” (I(A) 683) is the “biretta” worn by Augustinian canons⁵⁹—no description is given of it, and it could well be a fashion item rather than some sort of religious headgear—and surely the Pardoner's references to “my brethren” (VI(C) 416) simply designates his fellow-pardoners.⁶⁰ Of course, it is perfectly possible that Chaucer has borrowed some notions concerning mendicant poverty to help characterize the Pardoner (largely to set up some specific ideals which, quite outrageously, he is not living up to): here I have in mind the reference to the Pardoner's begging activity at l. 443 and the allusion to apostolic poverty at l. 447. But that does not make him a friar. In any case, those ideals were not exclusively the prerogative of friars.

Besides, the interests of friars and pardoners often diverged quite sharply, and they could come into direct competition; it would therefore be a mistake to lump them together.⁶¹ A document (dated 1350) included in the register of William de la Zouche, Archbishop of York, makes it clear that, if friars and pardoners should appear at the same time at “churches, chapels, or other ecclesiastical places,” then the friars must be allowed to do their work first, preaching “the word of God to the clergy and to the people wishing to hear it” and receiving “the alms of the faithful freely given by the urging of divine charity.”⁶² Only then may the *quaestores* take their turn, going about their business “following the form prescribed by sacred canons.” One can easily imagine what Chaucer's Pardoner would have said about that: his pride could scarcely have tolerated it. And Heywood's Pardoner and Friar squabble over who has priority in addressing one and the same audience. The latter complains to the parish priest who invited them into his church and now regrets it,

FRERE: . . . I desyred hym, ywys, more than ones or twyse
To holde his peas tyll that I had done,
But he wolde here no more than the man in the mone.

PARDONER: Why sholde I suffre the more than thou me?
Mayster Parson gave me lycence before the,
And I wolde thou knewyst it. (*The Pardoner and the Frere*, 554–59)

Commenting on the Pardoner's portrait in the General Prologue, the *Riverside Chaucer* remarks, “this Pardoner's participation in the

Mass seems to indicate that he has clerical status.”⁶³ But this statement is misleading— at once vague and lacking in supporting evidence—and quite at variance with the blatant implication of VI(C) 391, as quoted above, that he is *not* a cleric. The appellation “ecclesiaste” (I(A) 708) means simply that he is a preacher,⁶⁴ a fact which is blatantly obvious; the issue of whether he *should* be preaching is a different matter. Chaucer’s account of the Pardoner’s hairstyle has provoked some critical debate (is it meant to be ugly or attractive?), but at any rate he does not appear to possess the clerical tonsure.

The Pardoner seems to be particularly good at singing the “offertorie” (I(A) 710), which was performed when offerings were made at Mass. The *Lay Folks Mass Book* (York Use) has the priest and his assistants (*ministri*) singing this,⁶⁵ but it certainly was not necessary for a priest, or anyone in holy orders, to do so—the task was essentially that of a chorister.⁶⁶ In these terms, then, there is nothing here to clarify the Pardoner’s official status. But Chaucer’s reference to the Pardoner’s preaching after the offertory⁶⁷ highlights another major issue—namely, the importance of that part of the service for the livelihood of priests and pardoners alike. With the priest’s approval, a visiting pardoner could promote (or “preach,” in the looser sense of the term) the indulgences he had available for distribution—a major opportunity for him to advertise his wares. Langland complains about how “the parisshe preest and the pardoner” enter into a conspiracy to fleece the people and share the takings which should go to the poor of the parish (B Prol., 81–82). Presumably he is referring to the alms which changed hands when the pardoner distributed his indulgences, but he might also have in mind the offertory gifts as well—an appealing guest speaker would no doubt swell the congregation and hence the collection.⁶⁸ The bishop should not allow his “sel” (presumably the seal on the document which authorizes the pardoner to collect alms in his diocese) to be used in a way which deceives the people, Langland asserts. However, it is not “by the bisshop” that “the boy” preaches in a given church: that is a consequence of the (selfinterested) compliance of the parish priest (78–80). In similar vein, a stringent letter issued in 1356 by John de Grandisson, Bishop of Exeter, accuses church officials of being so “damnablely blinded by greed of the money so collected” that they “not only permit, but even most wickedly assist, advise and protect” certain impious *quaestores* “both of the Hospitals of the Holy Spirit and St John but also of other privileged places” in going about their nefarious business.⁶⁹

Not all relationships between parish priests and pardoners were so amicable, however. A bull sent in 1369 by Urban V to William Wittlesey, Archbishop of Canterbury, against *quaestores* working in England for the Hospital of St. John of Jerusalem,⁷⁰ tells an

extraordinary tale of turf wars and bitter faction-fighting, as such individuals promoted their services as preachers and fundraisers in a highly aggressive and, indeed, illegal manner.⁷¹ The common declaration that the pardoners under scrutiny must show their letters of authorization moves into an account of how, far from doing this, they have made counter-claims about their legal rights, and indeed have made life difficult for those who, in their view, fail to respect their privileges and hinder their collection of alms. One of their stratagems is to go to the church of a rector or vicar “on some feast day, especially when the people are accustomed to make their offerings” and read aloud a document relating to their fundraising activities or recite the names of the members of their brotherhood or fraternity: they do this for such a long time that “the mass for that day can no longer decorously be celebrated there. And thus they cause such rectors and vicars to be wickedly deprived of the offerings which come to them in masses of this type.”⁷² Those belligerent spoiling-tactics may serve to make it abundantly clear that although pardoners and parish priests often worked together, their very different professional functions should not be confused (cf. our earlier caveat against lumping together the activities of pardoners and friars), even though that was probably what happened in the minds of many parishioners—and no doubt the pardoners themselves often found it profitable to exploit such confusion.

What, then, of Chaucer’s statement that the Pardoner “Wel koude . . . rede a lessoun or a storie” (I(A) 709)? The former term, as the *Riverside Chaucer* suggests, may refer to a reading from the Epistolary, the traditional collection of “Epistles” based on the Pauline Letters of the New Testament, but it had a wide range of possible meanings.⁷³ The latter is even harder to interpret. “Storie” could loosely designate a moral narrative deriving from the Bible or indeed some other respected source (cf. the Pardoner’s use of the term “stories” at VI(C) 436 and 488); in this sense the *Pardoner’s Tale* itself is a “storie.”⁷⁴ Therefore, at I(A) 709, could Chaucer be thinking merely of his character’s preaching activities? That is unlikely, given the coupling of “storie” with “lessoun” and indeed with “offertorie” (710), which seems to indicate that Chaucer has in mind features of church services which are distinct from preaching, which is mentioned last in this sequence (711–13).⁷⁵ It is just possible that both “lessoun” and “storie” refer to the Epistle, the former term designating genre and the latter, content, for the Epistolary comprised materials relating to the history of the early Church. And it may be admitted that great store should not be set by a word so obviously selected for its rhyme with “offertorie,” a precise term quite crucial for Chaucer’s description of the point at which the Pardoner preaches. However, major questions

concerning the Pardoner's official role (or lack of it) are raised here, particularly in view of the suggestion that "storie" may designate the Gospel,⁷⁶ and so we must pursue our inquiry a little farther.

One did not have to be an ordained *priest* to "rede" either the Epistle or the Gospel during the Mass.⁷⁷ It was the task of the subdeacon to read the Epistle and of the deacon to read the Gospel—and the latter privilege was quite jealously guarded.⁷⁸ Now, the subdeaconate and deaconate were major orders, along with priesthood, which ruled out marriage.⁷⁹ And yet—at III(D) 163–68 the Pardoner tells the Wife of Bath that he is seeking a wife. True, these lines have proved notoriously difficult to interpret (cf. pp. 151–52, 154 below), but no matter how jocular they are deemed to be, and whether or not the Pardoner is physically capable of marriage, it would seem strange indeed if he were to jest about entering a state which his official position had totally ruled out. The case for him being in major orders is, therefore, problematic at best—and if it be accepted that he is not, then his pulpit activities are at best inappropriate and at worst quite irregular and illegal, depending on the weighting one gives to the terms "lessoun" and "storie." If the Pardoner is indeed presuming to read the Gospel during Mass—and I myself find that theory very weak—he is *far* out of line, since for that one had to be ordained at least to the level of deacon. The case that, in reading the "lessoun," he is usurping the subdeacon's privileges seems much stronger.⁸⁰

The Pardoner's social and professional status is, I believe, best understood in the light of a document on which we already have drawn, Bishop John de Grandisson's 1356 condemnation of both "impious quaestors" and the greedy officials who aid and abet them.⁸¹ Those pardoners are "neither friars nor clergy but often laymen or married men (*laicos aut conjugatos*),"⁸² yet they ply "their business in the office of preaching on solemn days within the solemnities of masses, an office which is not permitted to lesser deacons" (i.e., if subdeacons—who, as noted above, are in major orders—are barred from the *predicandi officium*, how much more should it be refused to such unauthorized pardoners?). Furthermore, "they indifferently absolve and free from usury and robbery without due satisfaction, even in cases reserved to the bishop or his superiors, and many times *a poena et a culpa*, to use their own words." That is, I believe, Chaucer's Pardoner to the life: a layman or at best a man in minor orders (with aspirations to becoming a married man, if we are to believe his own statement),⁸³ a figure who has taken upon himself, with no legal warrant, the *officium praedicatoris* and certain other functions properly reserved for those in major orders, particularly the power to absolve which is reserved to priests alone. To add insult to

injury, he dispenses absolution quite cavalierly, making inflated claims for what he is offering and failing to insist on the necessary satisfaction for sin.

In sum, it would seem that there is nothing in Chaucer's text to alleviate the charge that the Pardoner has usurped prestigious roles to which he has no right. As far as his preaching is concerned, it is very doubtful indeed if he has been officially "sent" in the manner intimated by Romans 10:15 ("How will they preach, unless they be sent?"). We have seen how Robert of Basevorn—quite typically—drew on this *sententia* when defining the criterion of authority, one of the "three things" which, he declares, "are necessary for the one exercising an act of preaching." Chaucer's Pardoner would unequivocally have failed to meet this criterion, though there is some room for debate concerning the specific quality and quantity of his failure, as I hope the above discussion has intimated. We may now proceed to consider how the Pardoner fares in relation to Robert's two other criteria, "competent knowledge" and "purity of life."

II. *PRECHYNG FOR COVEITYSE*: THE DEVIANT PREACHER

Moving away from the question of whether the Pardoner *should* be acting the way he does to the question of whether he has the *wherewithal* to do so, it is apparent that, although by no means a highly educated man, he does possess sufficient knowledge for the job. Raymond Rigaud could not have faulted him on that score at least (cf. p. 38 above). True, the Pardoner himself says all that he preaches has been learned off by heart—"I kan al by rote that I telle"⁸⁴—and it is all about one (opening) topic—that is, *Radix malorum est Cupiditas* (VI(C) 332–34). Yet his prologue and tale reveal a working knowledge of parts of the Bible, of *exempla*, of current theory of preaching and of the then-fashionable "thematic" sermon;⁸⁵ he knows Avicenna, at least by name. Neither is his technical competence and skill in doubt. In the third part of his *Cura pastoralis* St. Gregory had advised the preacher to suit his style to his audience, a recommendation echoed and amplified in many late-medieval *artes praedicandi* and priest's handbooks.⁸⁶ Alexander of Ashby, prior of the Augustinian house at Ashby in Northamptonshire between 1205 and 1215, remarks in his *De modo artificioso predicandi* that the levity (*levitas*) of a lively story (*iocundum exemplum*) edifies the unlearned.⁸⁷ Richard of Thetford (X. 1245?) declares that "reasoning through examples" is very effective with layfolk, claiming the authority of Aristotle "as much as Boethius and Gregory" for his contention that the laity "delight in sensible examples" (*sensibilibus gaudent exemplis*).⁸⁸ The Pardoner's version is that uneducated people love old tales:

Thanne telle I hem ensamples many oon
Of olde stories longe tyme agoon.
For lewed peple loven tales olde;
Swiche thynges kan they wel reporte and holde. (VI(C) 435–38)

He is highly aware of the capacities of his audience, and of the necessity of suiting his preaching to those capacities. The brilliant *exemplum* which he eventually offers the Canterbury pilgrims, the story of the three revelers in search of death, reveals a fine sense of the rhetorical and affective power of *exempla*. Preaching, says Ralph Higden, should inflame the human disposition (*affectus*) toward God,⁸⁹ and the Pardoner claims the ability to do just that, in spite of himself.

The *artes praedicandi* offer lists of essential requirements for effective preaching, considered from the point of view of technical skill and audience appeal. For instance, in his *De eruditione praedicatorum* Humbert of Romans states that God's representative should have clear diction, awareness of the intricacies and resources of language, a voice with a definite resonance, the ability to use a style the listener can easily understand, a moderate pace of delivery, succinct presentation without verbosity, simplicity of speech without excessive rhetorical ornamentation, prudence in varying his sermons according to the type of hearer, and pleasantness of speech.⁹⁰ Chaucer's Pardoner seems to possess most of these skills and graces, having a voice as resonant as a bell,⁹¹ an impressive way with words, and considerable stylistic competence. But he is, perhaps, inclined to overdo the rhetoric.⁹² Some of the purple passages in the preamble to his *exemplum*, such as

O wombe! O bely! O stynkyng cod,
Fulfilled of dong and of corrupcioun! (VI(C) 534–35)

would probably not have found favor with Humbert of Romans. Seneca, declares Humbert, stated that "A speech which is concerned with truth ought to be simple and straightforward."⁹³ "Other arts are a matter of ingenuity," he continues; in the art of preaching we are concerned with something much more serious. "A sick man does not look for an eloquent doctor. If the doctor who can cure him can also make an elegant speech about what has to be done, that is like having a helmsman who is also handsome." Having made every due allowance for changes in fashions of preaching between the time of Humbert and that of Chaucer,⁹⁴ the point remains a valid one, especially since many medieval clerics related extravagance in preaching to desire for earthly gain.⁹⁵ For example, Alan of Lille complained that "there are some who make earthly gain the motive for their preaching, but their preaching is extravagant (*sumptuosa*); such are rather merchants (*mercenarii*) than preachers, and so their preaching is to be heard and endured. That is why the Lord says: 'Do

what they tell you to do, but do not follow the example they set” (Matthew 23:3).⁹⁶ Certainly, Chaucer’s Pardoner is something of a merchant, an expert in the art of selling his wares dearly.

It is possible, furthermore, that he habitually engages in “extravagant” preaching in a different sense, by overdoing the gestures with which he emphasizes the crucial points in his disquisition:

Thanne peyne I me to strecche forth the nekke,
And est and west upon the peple I bekke,
As dooth a dowve sittynge on a berne.
Myne handes and my tongue goon so yerne
That it is joye to se my bisynesse. (VI(C) 395–99)⁹⁷

Thomas Waleys’ *De modo componendi sermones* offers a particularly lively version of the standard warning about observing modesty in one’s use of gestures and bodily motions. The preacher should “not be like a motionless statue but should show some seemly movements,” he explains, and then proceeds to describe what he regards as unseemly movements:

He should though take very great care not to throw his body into disorderly motions (*motibus inordinatis*), now suddenly lifting his head up on high, now suddenly casting it down, now turning himself to the right, now suddenly turning himself to the left with wondrous speed, now stretching out both hands as if he could embrace both east and west together (*quasi posset simul orientem occidentemque complecti*), now suddenly joining them both together, now extending his arms immoderately, now suddenly drawing them back. For I have seen some preachers who conducted themselves excellently in their sermons so far as all other matters are concerned, but so threw themselves around in the motions of their body that it seemed as if they were fighting a duel with somebody, or rather were insane, so much so that they would have thrown themselves to the ground along with the pulpit in which they were standing had not others come to their aid.⁹⁸

That sounds very much like Chaucer’s Pardoner, even down to the “est and west” idiom, though in the English text it is the head rather than the hands which is described as moving between those poles.

Waleys’ treatise also helps us to pinpoint yet another of the Pardoner’s excesses—and a much more offensive one at that. “The preacher should strongly beware of saying anything whereby anyone present or absent might be defamed or evilly marked”—unless, of course, that person has done something so harmful to the state, and his sin is so notorious, that he deserves to be preached against.⁹⁹ Now, while the Pardoner seems fully aware of the principle involved—“I telle noght his propre name”—he is able to indicate full well his victim’s identity “By signes, and by othere circumstances.” This may be compared with the way in which a friar preached against the holy woman Margery Kempe (c. 1373–c. 1439) in St. James’s chapel at Lynn—“he prechyd meche ageyn the seyd creatur, not expressyng hir name, but so he expletyd [explained] hys conseytys [thoughts] that

men undirstod wel that he ment hir.”¹⁰⁰ In a similar manner, Chaucer’s character requites those who have dared to displease his fellow-pardoners, while appearing “hooly and trewe” (VI(C) 417–22).

We may now focus on the most difficult and interesting issue of all: is it possible to ignore the example which the Pardoner sets in his life (or take it as an example of what *not* to do) and specifically follow his moral words, thereby being moved to repentance by his forceful literary “example,” the tale of the three revelers? The *quaestor* who tells the story of the quest for death has himself incurred spiritual death (yet another instance of murder in the poem, in this instance self-murder) by his mortal sin of unworthy preaching. Here is a clear case of the sinner who heaps sin upon sin by announcing the divine justice, thereby inviting the penalty threatened by God (cf. Psalm 49:16, 21).¹⁰¹ The schoolmen and theorists of preaching were adamant that the preacher must not prefer his own material gain to the spiritual profit of his hearers. Preachers, says Humbert of Romans, should imitate the Apostle Paul, who was looking not for gifts but for results (cf. Philippians 4:17). He was not seeking the goods of the people he was speaking to; he was seeking themselves (cf. II Corinthians 12:14).¹⁰² Our Pardoner, however, preaches for personal profit, is scornful of apostolic poverty, and (as already noted) is utterly callous about the welfare, spiritual or otherwise, of the people to whom he preaches.

Because the act of preaching has as its proper end or *finis* the objective of making men good, the Pardoner is sinning mortally by perverting this noble purpose. He who exhorts others to lead a good life is obliged to set the example, but the Pardoner has no intention of observing St. Jerome’s directive to “practise what you preach.”¹⁰³ Chaucer is posing in the sharpest, starkest way possible the question, is the Pardoner in any sense justified in claiming that a man guilty of the sin of avarice can teach others to turn away from this very sin?

though myself be gilty in that synne,
Yet kan I maken oother folk to twynne
From avarice and soore to repente. (VI(C) 429–31)

We have already heard several thirteenth-century schoolmen react with horror to the case of the *praedicator* or *doctor* who says one thing and does another. Similarly, in his art of preaching, Humbert of Romans echoes St. Paul’s question, how can a thief be expected to teach others not to steal?¹⁰⁴ He who encourages others to be good, it is emphasized, should himself be good. A particularly interesting attack on this kind of abuse is found in John Bromyard’s *Summa praedicatorum* (written in the second quarter of the fourteenth century), a work which, in the judgment of G. R. Owst, “presents us with the gathered fruits of Mendicant preaching in England

throughout the fourteenth century and even earlier.”¹⁰⁵ In his prologue Bromyard declares that edifying words which are unsupported by personal example do not suffice, quoting St. Gregory’s famous dictum that examples are more moving than words.¹⁰⁶ This principle is applied in his extensive *distinctio* on the *praedicator*. If your actions are evil or are supposed to be evil, Bromyard exclaims, who will believe your preachings or follow them, since men are influenced by examples more readily than words?¹⁰⁷ Who will believe the person who exhorts us to flee from pride when he himself displays pride in action, and likewise concerning other sins? It is as if a man, on being asked for directions to a certain place, replies that he is going there himself, but adds, “You go by that way and I will go by another.” Then the inquirer’s confidence in the way he has been shown will diminish, he will reckon his teacher to be a deceiver in respect of his words, and consequently he will follow the teacher’s course of action rather than his words. The same is true of preaching. If one asks a prelate or *doctor*, “What is the way to heaven?” they all will profess their wish to go there, saying, “Go by the way of mercy and purification and justice and penitence”; they will all preach that men should repent (cf. Mark 6:12). But when the hearers see that those prelates and teachers do not themselves walk by those paths, they will believe them the less, and frequently follow their example rather than their words. Bromyard, it would seem, was acutely aware of the extent to which the impeachable character of the man can undermine his unimpeachable message. Clearly, in absolute terms it is better that a man like the Pardoner should remain silent (to adopt Gerard of Bologna’s idiom; cf. pp. 40–42 above). By failing to practice what he preaches, he is bringing into disrepute the noble *officium praedicatoris* which he has assumed so arrogantly.

This theme of usurpation, indeed perversion, of what normally is good is accentuated by the imagery which Chaucer has the Pardoner employ in describing his preaching activity. He compares himself to a dove sitting on a barn (VI(C) 395–97) and to a serpent which spits out venom at its victim (412–22). The images of the serpent and the dove were conventional figures for the preacher, deriving in the main from Matthew 10:16, where Christ advises those whom He is sending out as preachers: “I send you out as sheep in the midst of wolves; so be wise as serpents and innocent as doves.” In late-medieval commentaries on Matthew this serpentine wisdom is usually identified as prudence: the preacher should avoid the snares and plots laid against him and, more generally, be wary of mere worldly wisdom. On the other hand, the quality of dovelike innocence—the dove being the only bird without a gall¹⁰⁸—was defined in terms of being innocent of earthly concupiscence and ignoring injuries inflicted on oneself. Such are the

interpretations found in the twelfth-century *Glossa ordinaria*, the postill on the whole Bible which Hugh of St. Cher O.P. compiled at Paris between 1230 and 1235, and the highly influential *Postilla litteralis* which another Paris master, Nicholas of Lyre O.F.M., completed in 1331.¹⁰⁹ The serpent, declares the *Glossa*, on going to drink does not take his venom with him but leaves it in his den; likewise, when going to the holy Church of God we should not bring with us in our thoughts any malice, voluptuousness, or enmity. Turning to the dove, while many aspects of this bird's nature were not regarded as praiseworthy—Pierre Bersuire describes it as wanton, lascivious, and at all times given to voluptuousness, weak and infirm¹¹⁰—it was deemed imitable in respect of its innocence and forbearance of evils, and of course its reputation was considerably enhanced by the fact that the Holy Spirit had appeared in the form of a dove at the baptism of Christ (Matthew 3:16).¹¹¹ Both Hugh of St. Cher and Nicholas of Lyre believed that Christ's advice to his disciples should be understood in terms of degree. Preachers should not always be as innocent as doves, says Hugh, lest they fall into traps. Neither should they always be like serpents, indiscriminately emitting venom; rather they should control it, in respect to time, person, and behavior. According to Nicholas of Lyre, the preacher of the gospel should be without bitterness, whence it is obvious that foxlike cunning is reprehensible, as is bovine simplicity; rather, the disciple of Christ ought to tread a middle road.

Considered in the light of these standards, Chaucer's Pardoner fares very badly. Whereas the dove lacks a gall, he certainly does not; indeed, he reflects the bad qualities of the dove (as defined in the *Glossa ordinaria*) rather than the good ones, and his serpentine activity, far from being anything to do with prudence, is reduced to the emission of venom against certain members of his congregation, on whom he inflicts personal abuse—without naming them, to be sure, but they are identified all the same (as already noted). Here is a ghastly parody of the recommendation to consider carefully the particular circumstances and thus be highly discriminating in one's use of venom.

One dovelike quality of the Pardoner which particularly interests Chaucer is his manner of stretching his neck to and fro and nodding over his congregation (VI(C) 395–96). This is an aspect of the bird's excessive curiosity and circumspection as described, for instance, by Bartholomaeus Anglicus, here quoted in John Trevisa's translation of 1398: "Also sche is nyseliche curious, for sittynge on a tree sche byholdeþ and lokeþ al aboute toward what partye sche wil sitte and bende hire necke al aboute as hit were takynge auysement. But ofte while sche taken auysement of flyȝt, ar sche take hire flyȝte, and

arewe fleep þurgh hire body.”¹¹² In this context the dove’s procrastination brings about its own destruction, but the moralizers of “the properties of things” could argue that the creature’s circumspection was a virtue. When perched on a branch, says Bersuire, it carefully deliberates before taking flight; likewise, the perfect man should have intellectual eyes which are limpid and clear by virtue of discretion, so that he can discriminate among infernal hawks, that is, by discerning how and in what way his enemies are trying to defraud him.¹¹³ It would seem, then, that the dove was regarded as one of those species of vigilant bird which were often appropriated as images of the good preacher.¹¹⁴ The Pardoner is dismally failing to live up to that good image: his “bekking” is to be seen rather in terms of extravagant gestures of the type criticized in Thomas Waleys’ *ars praedicandi*, as quoted above (pp. 120–21). It may be added that the barn on which Chaucer’s unlovely dove sits (397) might have reminded at least some of his readers of the occasional use of this image as a figure of the Church (deriving from exegesis of Matthew 13:24 ff.), one of the most elaborate examples in Middle English being Langland’s description of the barn of Holy Church in *Piers Plowman*, B XIX.319–20. In the context of Chaucer’s description of the Pardoner, such traditional associations serve to emphasize just how far that unscrupulous and deviant figure is from the truth.

This method of reading the *Pardoner’s Prologue* in relation to traditional discourses and imagery relating to preaching may also be applied to the remark, “I peyne me to han an hauteyn speche, / And ryngge it out as round as gooth a belle” (VI(C) 330–31). It may be wondered if the image of the bell would have reminded at least a section of Chaucer’s audience of I Corinthians 13:1, “If I speak in the tongues of men and of angels, but have not love, I am a noisy brass or a clanging cymbal.” This was often interpreted as designating the immoral man, particularly the immoral preacher, whose evil works belie his holy words. In the *Glossa ordinaria* St. Gregory is quoted as saying that the man who speaks of good things but does not follow them with love acts like a noisy brass or cymbal because he is not sensible of the sounds he makes. Nicholas of Lyre declares that those gifts which pertain to eloquence are of no value without charity. Just as the body lives on account of the soul so the soul is principally enlivened by charity; hence all speech which is without charity is dead.¹¹⁵ Hugh of St. Cher, while making the point that *sermo* without charity lacks its proper fruition, says that a noisy brass which does not delight in its own sound (being beaten in making it) may yet give profit and delight to others. Likewise, certain preachers destroy themselves in their preaching (Hugh is thinking of the offense they give to God)¹¹⁶ yet are useful to their audience—an argument of the

same kind as Henry of Ghent's carefully limited defense of the mercenary preacher (as discussed in Chapter 2 above). But Hugh is far from sanguine about such preachers, being very aware of the damage they can do: nothing blinds men so that they fail to recognize the benefits of God, he claims, like the preacher who is attached to cupidity and ambition.¹¹⁷

To sum up our argument thus far: on the one hand, Chaucer seems to be activating the *in malo* side of images of preachers and preaching which traditionally were employed *in bono* (witness a serpent who is spiteful in every sense of the term and a dove who is weak and wanton), and on the other, to be suggesting a deviation from the preacher's role as described in the Gospel, a perversion which often takes the form of reversal of value and significance. Instead of being the innocent and tolerant victim of abuses and snares (as in Matthew 10:16) the Pardoner is himself an agent of abuse and a hunter-figure, the wolf rather than the sheep.

A quite striking instance of reversal of significance occurs in lines 403–11, wherein Chaucer is quite obviously adopting certain terms of reference which figure in the scholastic debates canvassed above and in many preachers' handbooks. Many acts of preaching, admits the Pardoner,

Comth ofte tyme of yvel entencioun;
Som for plesance of folk and flaterye,
To been avaunced by ypocrisie,
And som for veyne glorie, and som for hate. (VI(C) 408–11)

This reprises Jean de Meun's attack on vainglorious preachers who pursue the death of their souls; their evil-intentioned preaching may nevertheless bring salvation to others: "bone predicacion / vient bien de male entencion" (*Rose*, 5071–88; quoted at the beginning of this chapter). Both vernacular writers are echoing theoretical discussions of *rectitudo intentionis*, the moral uprightness of the preacher's purpose. Henry of Ghent's account of the relevant issues has already been cited in our previous chapter. Nicholas Byard's list of *conditiones* necessary for good preaching includes "rightness of intention": one must intend nothing other than the salvation of the audience; not personal glory, or earthly reward.¹¹⁸ *Rectitudo intentionis* is required in a preacher, says Ralph Higden, so that he preaches with the fitting end or final cause in mind; this occurs when he speaks with a view to the glorification of God, the edification of his neighbors, and the arrival at truth.¹¹⁹ By contrast, flatterers intend to curry favor, pardoners (*quaestores*) hunt for temporal reward, while others (here described as "sellers of oil") are concerned with self-display. God will scatter the bones of such ungodly people, Ralph concludes, who have as their intention the pleasing of men. It would seem then that, here as

elsewhere, Chaucer's Pardoner has presented us with the categories and principles in accordance with which he must be judged and condemned.

Indeed, it could be said that the Pardoner labors the point about "yvel entencioun," for he returns to this subject later in his prologue:

But shortly myn entente I wol devyse:
I preche of no thyng but for coveitise.
Therefore my theme is yet, and evere was,
Radix malorum est Cupiditas. . . .
But though myself be gilty in that synne,
Yet kan I maken oother folk to twynne
From avarice and soore to repente.
But that is nat my principal entente;
I preche nothyng but for coveitise. (VI(C) 423–33)

The term *principal entente* as used here implies the scholastic distinction between primary intention and secondary intention. The Pardoner's declared primary intention is preaching "for coveitise," while making other folk turn away from avarice is a possible secondary intention. That is a flagrant reversal of the proper order of things. The schoolmen usually define primary intention in terms of improving the audience, of making its members good. Personal benefit was sometimes described as an acceptable secondary intention: some scholars said that it was perfectly all right for the preacher to think with part of his mind about the temporal reward which would accrue to him on account of his sermon, providing that the edification of his audience was uppermost in his thoughts.¹²⁰ This view is represented in our Paris student's notebook (BN Lat. 3804A).¹²¹ If someone preaches principally because of temporal profit he sins mortally, because it is not fitting that a spiritual action should have as its end something which is principally temporal. If, on the other hand, one preaches with temporal things as a secondary consideration, in as much as one may receive the necessities of life, this is quite acceptable. What is utterly unacceptable, the student continues, is the mercenary man who preaches principally on account of earthly goods, on account of reputation (i.e., vainglory) and material reward. Moreover, if vainglory moves a man to preach, so that his preaching has vainglory as its end, then this is a mortal sin. If, however, he started out with a good intention, but after the occasion of preaching gloried in the fact that he had preached well, this does not make the preaching a sin either venial or mortal. Our student ends his note with the tantalizing statement that "others say" that temporal considerations are not acceptable in preaching even as a secondary intention. Robert of Basevorn would have agreed with them: "Let the preacher see to it above all that he have a good purpose (*finem bonum*) for his sermon—such as the praise of God, or His saints, or the edification of his

neighbour, or some object deserving eternal life. If, secondarily, he also includes another purpose (*aliud finem secundario*)—that he be famous, or that he gain something temporal, or the like—he is an adulterer of the Word of God, and this is considered a mortal sin.”¹²² In Chaucer’s text, what might be acceptable (to the schoolmen) as a secondary intention—personal benefit—is defined by the Pardoner as his primary intention, and therefore is quite reprehensible, the intentions being in the wrong order. But there may be more to it than that: the Pardoner seems to entertain the possibility that he may do good in spite of himself:

Thus kan I preche agayn that same vice
Which that I use, and that is avarice.
But though myself be gilty in that synne,
Yet kan I maken oother folk to twynne
From avarice and soore to repent. (VI(C) 427–31)

Perhaps, despite his own “yvel entencioun” or bad “principal entente,” his material will function correctly and morally; it may indeed have the effect of turning some men from sin, an effect traditionally conceived of in terms of primary intention.

Is there any sense, then, in which we can find truth in the Pardoner’s claim that he, though an immoral man, can tell a moral tale and thereby turn others from sin? Perhaps there is. After all, Henry of Ghent assures us that, considered from the point of view of his state (*habitus*) of knowledge, a clever sinner can be a teacher of Scripture (cf. Chapter 2 above). And the weighty authority of *the* philosopher, Aristotle, could be marshaled in support of the view that a person did not have to be virtuous in order to be knowledgeable. But the total context of Henry’s statement must, of course, be remembered. We have seen how Henry, Thomas of Chobham, and Robert of Basevorn emphasized that a university lecturer or teacher need not have as his particular objective the moral (as opposed to the intellectual) improvement of his audience, whereas the preacher does. And since the Pardoner has presumed to preach, surely he should be judged according to the terms of reference of the *officium praedicatoris*, not those of the *officium doctoris*?¹²³

Should we therefore dismiss the Pardoner and refuse to listen to him? And must his message, the morality conveyed so impressively in the *exemplum* of the quest for death, be dismissed as being of no value? “Examples must be referred back to the intention of the exemplifier,” declares Matthew of Vendôme.¹²⁴ If the intention of the exemplifier is corrupt, is his *exemplum* thereby corrupted? To rephrase this question in terms of the Aristotelian theory of causality as applied above, does a subversion of end or objective (*finis, finalis causa*) subvert and devalue the literary form (*forma*) which is required by

that end?

The orthodox late-medieval response to these questions was in the negative, as has been demonstrated in our previous chapter. The mercenary preacher is to be tolerated, says Henry of Ghent, enlisting the authority of Philippians 1:18 for the view that Christ should be proclaimed by all and every means, whether in pretense or in truth (cf. pp. 46–47 above).¹²⁵ Given that he does possess true doctrine and manages in some measure to proclaim the truth, the *mercenarius*, Henry believes, should not be treated if he were a heretic. Similarly, John Bromyard advised against condemning preachers with personal shortcomings; that is something which one should not take upon oneself, because of the risk of slander, and also because the doctrine preached by a sinful preacher is not the sinner's but God's. With regard to the latter point, Bromyard has three things to say.¹²⁶ First, as Seneca argues in a certain epistle to St. Paul, God is sometimes spoken of by the mouth of a fool. The speech of a fool can, for instance, convert a sinner to God, as is illustrated by the *exemplum* of such a person who, by speaking openly and naively about a certain lord's wickedness and impending journey to hell, actually moved that lord to mend his ways. Do not, therefore, reject what unworthy preachers have to say, Bromyard advises, but from whatever is said extract the "implanted word, which is able to save our souls" (James 1:21). The main feature of the doctrine of fools is that they speak but do not act accordingly, a point which Bromyard emphasizes with the story of an abbot who, even though he could remove physical uncleanness from all those who came to him for help, nevertheless had a body full of filth and impurities. The parallel with the morally deficient preacher is obvious. Second, Bromyard cites St. Jerome's image of cold water which flows through ashes yet does not become polluted by them but retains its proper purity and can still cleanse.¹²⁷ The implication is, of course, that the immoral preacher does not pollute the message which flows through him; it remains efficacious as far as his listeners are concerned. Third, Bromyard employs the analogy of the water of baptism, which sends baptized children to heaven even though it itself is swallowed by the earth or descends into a pit. That water does not emanate from the person who is in need of baptism and wishes to enter heaven; after the baptism, it quickly descends into the earth. Similarly, a foolish man may preach the truth, although he himself may descend into hell. For example, the godless Nicanor came to testify that the Jews had a defender in their God, who made them invulnerable (II Maccabees 8:36). It would seem, then, that the immoral preacher does not pollute the message which flows through him; that remains efficacious for his audience. Chaucer's Pardoner would therefore seem to have a point. In orthodox statements like

Bromyard's may be found much to support his view that, although he himself is an immoral man, he can tell a moral tale; that, even though he himself is sunk in sin, he can show others how to flee from it. The Pardoner himself may be lost, but his audience need not be, providing that they can extract from his words the implanted Word which can save their souls.¹²⁸

This is all very well, it could be responded, as long as the sin of the preacher is secret. As we have seen, the traditional line was that an immoral preacher can have a good effect on his audience, provided that (or at least, especially if) they are ignorant of his sin. (On the same argument, while a priest's immorality had no adverse effect whatever on his sacraments, it was better if his parishioners were ignorant of his sinful state, since then they had no reason to stay away from his Mass.) If, however, the sin is or becomes public knowledge, then the preacher constitutes a source of scandal and endangers the spiritual welfare of his flock. Henry of Ghent's partial defense of the *mercenarius* seems somewhat less tolerant when it is realized that he seems to have in mind an individual whose wrongdoing is not known to his congregation (cf. pp. 46–47 above). In the case of the preacher whose immorality was notorious, Thomas of Chobham spoke for many of his contemporaries in declaring that such a man sinned mortally on account of the scandal he created. And surely it is significant that the Bromyard excursus quoted above completely avoids the subject of scandal; it may be suggested that it is only through the exclusion of the contrast between good *verba* and bad *vita* that he can argue as he does. Instead Bromyard narrowly concentrates on the *verba* themselves and their ultimate authorship: they belong to an authority higher than the weak vessel in which they have been placed. The unclean channel through which they flow is deemed to be relatively unimportant here.

But the uncleanness of the Pardoner as a vessel of truth is of the first importance in Chaucer's narrative. This character makes no secret of his moral deviancy;¹²⁹ indeed, he positively revels in "publishing" it to his audience of Canterbury pilgrims, apparently unworried by the risk of scandal. Here he is refusing to follow the allegorical example of Rachel who, as interpreted by Thomas of Chobham, commendably hid the idols of Laban in camel dung, thereby signifying the prudent preacher's practice of obscuring his habitual faults so that they may stink and become rotten in his heart. (I return to this allegorical extravaganza¹³⁰ because it is the most forceful— not to say the most memorable—justification of the priestly code of discretion known to me.) On the contrary, the Pardoner fails, however momentarily, to sense any risk in his spectacular action of indecent exposure—the moral equivalent of baring his bottom to the sight of men (cf. Chobham's exegesis, as summarized in our introductory chapter). At

least on this one occasion, in this unprecedented act of suicidal self-revelation, he refuses to perpetrate the traditional conspiracy of silence, by sitting on his sins. Rather he “publishes” his moral deviancy, openly and publicly.¹³¹ If the standard scholastic critique were applied, it could be said the effect of his preaching is thereby destroyed, since the pilgrims are bound to take more notice of his bad personal example than of his good *exemplum*. Little wonder, then, that he should receive insults rather than alms.

There is much to support this reading. In particular, the Pardoner’s request that his hearers should hold their peace (“Now hoold youre pees! My tale I wol bigynne”; VI(C) 462), coming as it does immediately after his shocking claim that, even though he is an immoral man who preaches for personal gain, he can nevertheless tell a moral tale, can be regarded as an indication that already they are finding him somewhat objectionable. This reading may be pursued by taking the Host’s subsequent robust rejection of his invitation to offer to his relics as symptomatic of the views of the Canterbury pilgrims at large. On the other hand, the Host’s reaction may be read as an illustration of the risk a preacher ran in singling out an individual “proprely” rather than playing it according to the rules of the *ars praedicandi* by keeping the censure general. Besides, the Host has certain “propre” reasons for being annoyed with the Pardoner which owe little to scholastic debate on the *officium praedicatoris* (though they are intriguingly interwoven with a eucharistic subtext which will be discussed below). For the Pardoner’s indictment of blasphemy (however hypocritical and participatory it may be) could be seen as a specific criticism of the Host, a great swearer who initiated the Pardoner’s performance with a speech which includes the phrases “by nayles and by blood” and “By corpus bones” (VI(C) 288, 314). Moreover, Harry Bailly, as an innkeeper by profession, might well have taken personal offense at the Pardoner’s metaphorical critique of the tavern as the devil’s church.¹³²

They [i.e., the young revelers] daunce and playen at dees bothe day and nyght,
Thurgh which they doon the devel sacrificse
Withinne that develes temple in cursed wise
By superfluytee abhomynable. (VI(C) 467–71)

This discourse was well-established, but none the less hurtful for that, one may imagine. To take one example from the many available, John Gower remarked that

Sicome prodhomme le moustier
Quiert pour devoutement orer,
L’omme yvre fait par autre guise,
Si quiert taverne a son mestier:
Car la taverne au droit juger

Est pour le deable droite eglise,

U prent des soens le sacrefise. (*Mirour de l'omme*, 8257–63)

[Just as the worthy man seeks the church in order to pray devoutly, the drunken man seeks the tavern for his purpose; for the tavern, rightly speaking, is the devil's own church, where he [i.e., the devil] accepts the sacrifice of his own [followers].]133

Little wonder, then, that the Host should counterattack so robustly when the Pardoner (perhaps a victim of his own imagery) finally comes to describe him as the greatest sinner among the Canterbury pilgrims and therefore the obvious person to lead the company in accepting the Pardoner's services.

But the interpretive problems surrounding the Host (to which we will return) do not, of course, in any way weaken the startling, indeed appalling, implications of the Pardoner's declaration—an immoral man can tell a moral tale just as well as a good man can, indeed better than many good men can, since they may lack the necessary technical skills. This is Chaucer's *translatio* of the scholastic justification of the authoritative words of the immoral preacher. His treatment was highly topical, particularly since in his day the standard strategy for saving the appearances, which depends upon acceptance of the distinction between the *officium praedicatoris* and the man assuming it, was coming under great pressure. The list of opinions condemned at Archbishop William Courtenay's Blackfriars council of May 1382 included the notions that "if a bishop or priest is in mortal sin, he may not ordain, consecrate, or baptize" and "no one can act as a civil magistrate, bishop or prelate while he is in mortal sin."¹³⁴ If a pope is predestined to damnation, a bad man and hence a "member of the devil," then he lacks all spiritual power over faithful Christians.¹³⁵ The implications for preaching are profound. Evil men should not preach; good men should preach, whether they are acting legally or not. Wyclif's followers deemed it "lawful for anyone, even a deacon or priest, to preach the word of God without authorization of the Apostolic See or a Catholic bishop or of any established authority."¹³⁶ And anyone who foregoes preaching (or indeed listening to) the word of God on account of the excommunication of men is spiritually excommunicated and will be considered a traitor to God at the day of judgment.¹³⁷

Courtenay charged Professor Peter Stokes O. Carm. to suppress the holding, teaching, and preaching of such views in the University of Oxford, both in the schools and beyond, *publice vel occulte*.¹³⁸ But the tares of heresy had been sown effectively, and grew quickly. John Purvey held that the priest or bishop who did not implement his office in his life, by setting a good example, was excommunicated by God.¹³⁹ The fourth of the seven heresies which Purvey was forced to confess and retract at St. Paul's Cross on 6 March 1401 was that those prelates or clerics who live in evil fashion against the doctrine and example of

Christ do not possess the keys of the kingdom of heaven but rather the keys of hell.¹⁴⁰ And Wyclif and his followers believed that if the sacred arm of the law could not or would not act against such miscreants, then the secular arm should. In *De veritate sacrae scripturae* it is argued that false clergymen render themselves inferior to laymen, and so it is up to princes to come to the aid of the poor people who are being fleeced by such degenerates: whether they be priests or bishops, they should be deposed.¹⁴¹ Their doctrine is not to be trusted, however clever they may be intellectually. Thus the Lollard tract *De officio pastoralis* accuses those who preach with a worldly motive of mixing “venym” (venom, poison) with good seed—obviously, they have nothing in common with the serpentine wise preachers described in Matthew 10:16 but are all too similar to Chaucer’s venom-spitting Pardoner, who also preaches for vainglory and desire of worldly goods, whether it be money, corn, or whatever.

þis prest þat sowiþ may meddle venym wiþ þis seed, as whanne he prechiþ for veyn glory or for coueytise of worldly good. . . . þey [i.e., such preachers] shulden speke of god & not þus of rotun seed, & as þei weren bifore god, kepinge good maner in þis lordis presence. & þey shulden preche for cristis worship on his maner not for muc. for among alle symonyes þat euere crist sufferide in þe chirche þis is þe fouleste of all opere, vsid ofte of prechour beggeres, for þey wolen gedere comynly godis aftir þat þey han prechid; opere money or corn or what opere godis þat þey may gete.¹⁴²

People who give alms to men like that, the argument continues, are actually partners in sin, and it is a “foul error” to say that they are giving out of love for God and that is all that matters. By contrast with such poisonous and false preachers, the Lollard “poor priests,” often unauthorized in the technical sense of not being licensed, claimed an authority based on their own godly living and set out to preach the Gospel without desire of gain.¹⁴³

Concerning the Pardoner’s *exemplum* of the quest for death, doubtless a Lollard would have said that in this case the evil character of the preacher utterly devalues the tale he uses in his sermon—providing, of course, any Lollard would have engaged the problem in that way. Many of his kind distrusted the use of worldly tales (what one Wycliffite text terms “lesyngis, fablis, & cronyclis”) in preaching.¹⁴⁴ “Fabulacioun or tale tellyng is to be exschewed,” thunders the Lollard *Rosarium theologie*, quoting in support I Timothy 4:7, “avoid foolish and old wives’ fables: and exercise thyself unto godliness.”¹⁴⁵ The “wordez of holy redyng” should be found in the mouth of a clerk, not “fables of seculer nede or occupacions,”¹⁴⁶ continues the anonymous compiler; one can imagine him having little truck with what Alexander of Ashby termed the levity (*levitas*) of a lively story (*iocundum exemplum*).¹⁴⁷ Such criteria would seem to bar the *Pardoner’s Tale* from most Lollard libraries. In any case, the moral deviancy of the Pardoner would probably have provoked their total

censure without further analysis being required. Fornicator priests should be boycotted, asserts the *De officio pastorali*; men should neither hear their Masses nor accept any other spiritual service from them, “for al þer lif is wlapid [wrapped] wiþ synne, & þey don harm what euere þei don.”¹⁴⁸ By the same token, no self-respecting Lollard would have heard out the Pardoner’s narrative.¹⁴⁹

That point may serve to indicate the gulf between Chaucer’s project and the narrowly puritanical and brutally iconoclastic tendencies of certain versions of Lollardy.¹⁵⁰ (The literary sensibilities of such “Lollard knights” as Sir John Clanvowe and Sir Lewis Clifford find few if any parallels in fifteenth-century Lollardy.)¹⁵¹ Chaucer’s ideological base may be identified as fundamentally orthodox. Shocking as the Pardoner’s authority-claim may be, it has on its side the Church’s traditional refusal to make official authority a matter of personal righteousness. Indeed Chaucer, had he wished to be even more outrageous than he is already, could have exploited the fact that even if the individuals responsible for issuing and distributing the indulgences in question were the most immoral of men, that would not have diminished their value to the Pardoner’s clients. The Pardoner himself is only the “publisher” and distributor of those indulgences, as already noted; in this regard his personal life is of no significance whatever. Moving higher up the food-chain, so to speak, no matter how immoral their human originator (most likely a bishop or the pope himself) may have been, providing he had the key of jurisdiction his pardons were as efficacious as those of the holiest of men.¹⁵² In sum, there was available a strong body of theological support for the notion that, although the Pardoner is an immoral man, the indulgences which he offers are as valid as those originating from and/or dispensed by the holiest of men; his clients can rest assured of that. Thus, the Pardoner’s claim to be able to tell a moral tale would have had even more warrant. But Chaucer does not go down that route, being content to stay close to the notion (as expressed well by Jean de Meun) that good preaching may well come from an evil intention. The evil life of a preacher does not necessarily destroy his preaching; *per consequens* the evil life of the Pardoner does not destroy the morality of his tale. The problems (both intellectual and social) posed by the immoral preacher have been presented in their most acute form.

Chaucer has lent character to abstract calculation and given the schoolmen’s nightmares their looking glass.¹⁵³ And yet—what is at stake here is rather more complex than an illustration of official fears of the scandal which can be caused by an immoral preacher, however horrendous that scandal might be and however brilliantly those fears contribute to Chaucer’s realization of the Pardoner. For he is also

looking toward a world which is far wider than that of *prechyng* and the *scoles of clergy*.¹⁵⁴ To that wider world he suggests that what makes a moral tale effectively moral is not the morality of the writer (somehow manifested in his writing, as much medieval literary theory apparently assumed) but rather the high quality of the craftsmanship which he exercised in its *makinge*. Bad moral behavior by the artist does not necessarily make for bad art, whereas lack of skill certainly does. And the products of art, including literary fiction, can possess a moral authority which far transcends any moral deviancy on the part of the author. Although a lie in the sense of “something made up” (*res fictae* rather than *res factae*),¹⁵⁵ fiction can sometimes be said to possess *auctoritas*, even though the liar—a man like the Pardoner—cannot be regarded as a sound *auctor*. If that sounds like an implausibly radical position, it should be noted that in large measure it was preceded by the orthodox Christian belief that the immoral preacher is (within certain limits, of course) to be heard and tolerated, since his holy words—from the Bible and other authentic writings—are not devalued by the imperfect channel through which they pass. By cleverly putting an *exemplum* (with a clear moral message, yet a secular tale of human invention) in place of those “holy words,” Chaucer moves some distance toward the appropriation of a theological rationalization for his own purposes.¹⁵⁶ Here, then, may be found the makings of a profoundly anti-Donatistic poetics.

III. BREAKING BODIES: THE DRUNKARD'S EUCHARIST

One crucial feature of the Lollard grounding of public office in personal righteousness requires fuller attention here, namely, its implications for the theology of the Eucharist—for that may be regarded as the ultimate terminus for all the problems concerning the preaching of a person whose immoral *vita* is at variance with his authoritative *verba*, the context in which the threat of pollution presents itself in its most dangerous form. We have already noted how Robert of Basevorn turned to “what we would say about one administering some sacrament in mortal sin” to find the answer to the question of what to say about the immoral preacher (cf. p. 53 above). The relationship between these discourses will now be explored, in order to provide an interpretive context for the many eucharistic allusions which feature in the *Pardoner's Tale*.

The orthodox position—which has been discussed at some length in Chapter 2—was that the immoral priest who consecrated the elements did himself great spiritual harm, but not the recipient, the bone of contention existing between God and the priest who had dared to administer in that state. This is reiterated with utter clarity in

the *Festial* (a sermon collection) which was produced between 1382 and 1390 by John Mirk, an Augustinian canon of Lilleshall Abbey in Shropshire and a critic of Lollard doctrine:

eche prest haþ of Cristis ³left power forto make þis sacrament, be he bettyr, be he wors. For þat sacrament is so he³e and holy in hymself, þat þer may no good man amende hit, ne no euel man apayre [i.e., impair] hit. But þe preest þe which is a good lyuere, and doþ his offyce well and worþely, hym schal be well þat euer he was borne. . . . And he þat is an euel lyuer, and wot hymself in dedly synne, and is in no purpos to amende hym, be hym sekyr forto haue a perpetual confusion of fendys in helle, and be vndur hem in euerlastyng payne.¹⁵⁷

Clearly, this parallels the case of the immoral preacher who heaps sin upon sin by announcing the divine justice, yet does not pollute the teaching which he transmits. But according to the Lollards (and the doctrine has clear sources in Wyclif's own writings), deviant priests harm not just themselves but everyone around them: "what euere þei don, in masse or mateyns or oþer dedis of þer lif, þey harmen hem silf & þer pari³s & oþer puple þat is aboute hem."¹⁵⁸ The immoral priest is not a true priest at all, and the sacraments which he administered are therefore of questionable value. On this argument, the evil life of the office-holder actually devalues the office and reduces or destroys the power which it normally carries.

Wyclif's exploration of such daring doctrine in *De Eucharistia* starts from the premises that the confection of the host signifies *inter alia* the union of Christ and the Church, and that such a union is more effectively signified by one who works for it rather than by one who impedes it.¹⁵⁹ His conclusion is that not just the Mass but even the host of a good priest is better than that administered by one who is not so good; what matters is the extent to which the life of Christ is appropriately signified, and such signification is at its best when a good priest says Mass and confects the Eucharist.¹⁶⁰ If a coin (*denarius*) is better in the hands of a prudent man than in a fool's, then surely the Eucharist is of greater benefit in the hands of the righteous minister who renders with it fruit a hundredfold, than in the hands of the reprobate minister, who with it damns both himself and the people.¹⁶¹ In these terms, then, the sacrament of a good priest is more efficacious than that of a bad priest—a position which, Wyclif claims, is supported by those many decretals which order us not to attend the Mass of a priest who is a notorious fornicator, because a person like that is hateful to both God and man and injurious to the church. Of course, canon law does not support this inference, as the discussion in our previous chapter has made quite clear. The orthodox response to Wyclif's casuistry would be that, even though a notoriously corrupt priest should be shunned by his congregation, nevertheless there is nothing wrong with his sacraments in themselves, since their efficacy derives from his priestly office rather than from his personal state of

grace. And therefore the sacraments he consecrates may be accepted with confidence. Wyclif's remarks, as quoted above, undermine the basis of that confidence. Indeed, in *De veritate sacrae scripturae* he asserts that a layman who attends the Mass of a priest who is living in open sin is himself disobedient to the Church and in danger of excommunication.¹⁶² The notion that the Mass of such a priest may be heard providing that he does not live in open sin while officiating, is here dismissed as mere sophistry.¹⁶³ Some of Wyclif's followers pushed these ideas toward blatant Donatism by claiming that the value of the mass and the worth of the Host vary in accordance with the spiritual condition of the priest. For example, the anonymous Lollard author of the treatise *Of Prelates* declares that "a prest may be so cursed & in heresie þat he makip not þe sacrament."¹⁶⁴

And this brings us back to Chaucer's Pardoner. The large number of eucharistic allusions and jests which keep cropping up in both the preamble to his main *exemplum* and the *exemplum* itself go far beyond coincidence or casual use. Indeed, Robert E. Nichols has gone so far as to claim the existence of "a web of oaths and curses which interlaces Introduction, Prologue, and Tale, fashioning a continuous portrait of the Eucharist's great archetype," beginning with Harry Bailly's remarks "by nayles and by blood" and "by corpus bones" (VI(C) 288, 314).¹⁶⁵ However, in order to understand better the significance of Chaucer's eucharistic allusions, before going into specifics we must first briefly consider the wider context in which they function, namely, Chaucer's appropriation of the tradition of *peccata oris*, those "sins of the mouth" which comprise not only excessive eating and drinking but also lying, swearing and blasphemy (*inter alia*). Thus gluttony and the *peccata lingue que pertet ad os* (or the sins "of wikkede tonge")¹⁶⁶ were intimately related.¹⁶⁷

In various Middle English treatises which derive from the *Somme le Roi* (dated 1279) of the Dominican Lorens d'Orléans, the tavern is described as "þe welle of glotonye" and the devil's chapel or school wherein his scolers" receive many "lessouns," including "to do glotonye, vilanye and leccherie, swere & forswere, lye, sclaunder [i.e., slander],. . . to be false, wrongful, manace, make barette [i.e., contention], mayntene wrong, lette right, contreue {gile and treccherie}, reneye [i.e., renounce] God, make contakkes and stryues, & mellees {and} manslaughtres."¹⁶⁸ A formidable list, and definitive of the range of behavior which characterizes the Pardoner's three denizens of the "develes temple": "Forsweryng, ire, falsnesse, homycide" (*Pardoner's Tale*, VI(C) 470–71, 657).

One of the manifestations of "yuel tunge" namely, "forsweryng," is of crucial importance in the *Pardoner's Tale*. In the anonymous *Myrour to Lewde Men and Wymmen* (c. 1400) this branch is subdivided into no

fewer than six leaves, one of which is termed “vilayn swerynge”: “as by God, by his myght, by his halowes, by his soule, by his herte, his peyne, his flesche, his blood, his deth, his {feet}, his hondes, his nayles, his fynGRES, his body, his bones or all his oper {lymes}.”¹⁶⁹ When Christian men swear they “tereþ” Christ’s limbs “and “schedep his blood eche day newe,” thereby being worse than the Jews, who put God to death on only one occasion, and than the Saracens, for they do not swear as villainously by God or Lord Jesus Christ as Christian men do. Moreover, Christian men are more cruel than the Jews inasmuch as the Jews did not break any of Christ’s bones,¹⁷⁰ but by their blasphemies Christians break his “body & bak and euery lyme,” as a beast is broken in a butcher’s shop. Now, at the outset what especially interests the Pardoner about the revelers is the way in which they swear and blaspheme, thereby tearing and breaking the body of Christ.

Oure blissed Lordes body they totere—

Hem thoughte that Jewes rente hym noght ynough— (474–75)

Later the Pardoner will illustrate, once more, that he is preaching against the very same vices which he uses¹⁷¹ when he engages in villainous swearing by God and Lord Jesus (VI(C) 651–55), on the pretext of an attack on those who utter outrageous oaths.

Returning to an earlier point in the narrative sequence, we may note that the initial reference to “superfluytee abhomynable” of eating and drinking, which is described as a sacrifice to the devil (468–71), leads into an elaborate attack on gluttony, with particular reference to excess of wine and drunkenness. Gluttony is identified as the cause of the Fall from Eden, which damned all mankind until Christ “bought us with his blood agayn” (501); gluttons are described as the “enemys of Cristes croys” (532). Early on in the text, therefore, a discourse has been established which alludes to the eucharistic element of wine/blood. Furthermore, three short *exempla* are presented concerning the use and abuse of wine, two Scriptural (Lot and his daughters, Herod and John the Baptist) and one secular (Attila’s inglorious death). In the main *exemplum*, the story of the quest for death, the revelers send one of their number to “brynge us breed and wyn ful prively” (797), and we are told in considerable detail of how he poisons the wine. (In parallel to this stands the charge (562–72) that unscrupulous innkeepers mix cheap Spanish plonk into the excellent wine of La Rochelle or Bordeaux— another image of adulteration.)¹⁷² On his return, the other revelers stab “hym thurgh the sydes tweye” (828): perhaps this is reminiscent of how the crucified Christ was stabbed, though in His case only one side was pierced, so the verbal match is not exact. Then the two remaining revelers celebrate their unholy

communion with the poisoned wine. One of them drinks, and “yaf his felawe drynke also” (887). This idiom seems rather formal and ritualistic in view of the fact that they have three “large botelles” (871) between them (so why should both drink from the same one?), and may have been suggested by the Gospel accounts of how, at the last supper, Christ first blessed the chalice and then gave it to his disciples. “Having taken the chalice, giving thanks, he gave it to them. And they all drank of it” (Mark 14:23; cf. Matthew 26:27 and Luke 22:17, 20). Here the eucharistic allusion seems too obvious to be dismissed as mere coincidence or chance stylistic recollection.

In sum, while the Pardoner’s excursus generally follows the logic, so to speak, of the medieval discourse of gluttony, a new factor has been introduced, a specific direction given to the *peccata oris* whereby imagery relating to the Eucharist has been interjected, to create an effect quite different from that generally found in the pastoral treatises which were influenced by the *Somme le Roi* of Lorens d’Orléans.¹⁷³ On the strength of this, it could be suggested that when the revelers engage in their “vilayn swerynge” they are practicing a profane rite all too horribly appropriate to the “develes temple” which is the tavern (cf. 469–70): a “sacrifise” to the “devel” in the form of an anti-eucharist, the breaking of Christ’s body in a way which betokens spiritual death rather than a holy sacrament conducive to eternal life. Moreover, the “false empoysonere” (894) could perhaps be taken as a type of the false priest who figuratively poisons the wine, thereby causing the spiritual death of its recipients. On this reading he would stand in parallel to that other “false empoysonere,” the Pardoner himself, who spits out venom at his congregation and generally mars the doctrine he is preaching by his bad example.¹⁷⁴

Two versions of that reading are possible in terms of fourteenth-century value systems, one deriving from orthodoxy and the other from heterodoxy. On the orthodox formulation, the poisoning may be taken as a symbol of the evil *conditiones* of the deviant priest, whose behavior scandalizes his flock to the extent that they wander from the paths of righteousness, thereby risking the deaths of their souls. (The bad priest’s host itself, of course, is as good as that confected by a good priest, but that may not be of much comfort to the members of his congregation who find him deeply offensive.) A more radical reading, based on Lollard heterodoxy—or, perhaps more accurately, on what the Lollards’ opponents constructed as their heterodoxy¹⁷⁵—would go something like this. The deviancy of a priest may be so extreme that it debases everything he does: “a prest may be so cursed & in heresie þat he makip not þe sacrament.”¹⁷⁶ It pollutes both his Eucharist and his preaching, and anyone who allows such a man to minister to him is imbibing spiritual poison. By the same token, the

immoral Pardoner is incapable of telling a truly moral tale; its audience should therefore identify and refuse the poison which it contains.

I myself cannot accept that latter approach because in my view there is no irrefutable textual evidence that Chaucer deliberately sabotaged what I have been calling his main *exemplum*, the story of the quest for death, which must be the basis of the Pardoner's claim for excellence in moral narration. There, as it were, all my tests for poison have proved negative. (Other scholars have, to be sure, been less confident,¹⁷⁷ but no-one has yet produced a "positive reading" obtained in a Lollard laboratory.) However, the possibility that Chaucer had in mind the Wycliffite controversy over the Eucharist, however unobtrusively it may show up in his text, is a tantalizing one, and this hypothesis may find some support in the most complex of all the Pardoner's eucharistic references. Certain cooks, he declares, transform meat so thoroughly (by de-boning and applying sauces) that they turn "substaunce into accident" (539). In other words, they seem to transform the essence of the food, its proper and true nature, into mere properties, i.e., qualities which are "accidental" in the sense of being subsidiary and incidental and hence liable to change and alteration. (Put more simply, cooks can change the appearance and taste of meat so thoroughly that its original character seems to be of no consequence.)

The direct source of this passage, as is well known, is Pope Innocent III's discussion of gluttony in *De miseria condicionis humane* (1195).

But now the fruits of trees are not sufficient for gluttons, nor the varieties of vegetables, nor the roots of plants, not the fish of the sea, nor the beasts of the earth, nor the birds of the sky, but they seek for colourings (*pigmenta*), compare aromas, nurse fattened birds, catch the plump ones, which are studiously (*studiose*) prepared by the skill of the cooks, which are splendidly presented by the ceremony of the "ministers" (*officium ministrorum*). One grinds and strains, another mixes and confections (*conficit*), turns substance into accident (*substanciam vertit in accidens*), changes nature into art, so that satiety turns into hunger, squeamishness recovers an appetite; to stimulate gluttony, not to sustain nature; not to fill a need, but to satisfy a desire.¹⁷⁸

However, what for Innocent was the briefest of jests (an incidental pleasantry which is neither followed through nor reiterated in his subsequent discussion) has, in Chaucer's text, taken on a considerable resonance, particularly in relation to the eucharistic subtext which pervades the Pardoner's narrative. It is highly likely that Chaucer recognized in *The Wretched Engendrynge of Mankynde*¹⁷⁹ a technical idiom evocative of the eucharistic controversy of which Wyclif was the main protagonist.¹⁸⁰ It is difficult if not impossible to believe that an intellectual using that language in the 1390s would have been unaware of the furor which the "venerable doctor's" attack on the

doctrine of transubstantiation had caused, involving a condemnation (in 1380) by a commission appointed by the Chancellor of Oxford University and a personal appeal for moderation by no less a personage than John of Gaunt—who, whatever his intellectual competence to understand a difficult school-matter (which perplexed many professionals) may have been, knew an impending crisis when he saw one.¹⁸¹ Wyclif was unrepentant, and between 1380 and his death in 1384 continued to elaborate and defend his opinions on this most sensitive of subjects.

“The doctrine of the Eucharist became for Wyclif the touchstone to judge all matters.”¹⁸² And little wonder. The belief that in absolute terms the Eucharist is “the greatest of all the sacraments”¹⁸³ was not an invention of the age of Wyclif; it went back a long way in Christian tradition, and had been emphasized by all the major thirteenth-century schoolmen whose discussions of the subject we reviewed in our previous chapter. “Take away this Sacrament from the Church and what is left in the world besides error and unbelief?” Bonaventure had asked. Wyclif’s opponents thought the heresiarch was creating precisely that horrifying situation. Hence Roger Dymmok’s panicky but highly revealing remark that if the Lollard argument concerning the Eucharist “should thrive, it would destroy all the sacraments of the Church, all the oaths of kings, and the political association of all men with one blow.”¹⁸⁴ It is hardly surprising, then, that inquisitors should have chosen this particular sacrament as a major “mousetrap” with which to catch Lollards. It had the added advantage of being “situated . . . on a ground so argumentatively vexed that no position could confidently be sustained against the full weight of orthodox institutions.”¹⁸⁵ For centuries, there had been an allowable range of acceptable opinion on the matter,¹⁸⁶ a flexibility which the reaction against Wyclif’s teaching was a major factor in bringing to an end, though the prosecution of continental heresy also played its part.

It was on this central and controversial site that the major academic theologians of the later Middle Ages worked out their rationalizations of the power of the priesthood (to reiterate a claim made in Chapter 1 above). The interconnection is well expressed in the answer with which Margery Kempe pleased the Abbot of Leicester and his clerics, when in 1417 they examined her knowledge of the articles of faith.

Serys, I beleve in the sacrament of the awter on this wyse: that what man hath takyn the ordyr of presthode, be he nevyr so vicyows a man in hys levyng, yf he sey dewly tho wordys ovyr the bred that owr Lord Jhesu Criste seyde whan he mad hys Mawnde among hys disciplys ther he sat at the soper, I beleve that it is hys very flesch and hys blood and no material bred, ne nevyr may be unseyd, be it onys seyde.¹⁸⁷

And here we may, I believe, seek an explanation of why Chaucer

found eucharistic jesting relevant to his *Pardoner's Tale*. Take the many and varied problems raised by a deviant preacher preaching a sermon *ad populum*, and a deviant pardoner daring to far exceed his (very limited) authority by offering what looked (to lewd folk at least) like priestly absolution, and push them to their logical conclusion, regard them in their worst possible aspect, and one gets—that ultimate test-case of authority *ex officio*, what is to be said when a blatantly deviant priest dares to confect the Eucharist? The poet recognized that here the problems of textual authority which he had raised through the Pardoner manifested themselves in their most acute form. And in a form which, in the 1390s, was perceived as doctrinally subversive, and certainly was dangerous politically. Given that Wyclif's eucharistic ideas (however understood) had, so to speak, hit the headlines, there seems no reason to doubt Chaucer's awareness of them, on some level, however basic.

Innocent III's eucharistic joke long predates Lollardy, of course, a heresy about which the pope could not possibly have known anything.¹⁸⁸ And, as already noted, it appears in *De miseria condicionis humane* as a (rare) stand-alone joke, complete in and of itself. Chaucer makes it part of a jocular subtext which runs the full length of the *Pardoner's Tale*. This entire complex may be deemed to implicate Lollard controversy only insofar as the crucial issues had acquired a (dangerous) topicality,¹⁸⁹ thanks to Wyclif's decision to put up a fight and his opponents' decision to persecute him and his followers. On the one hand, one can understand why Chaucer was drawn to the eucharistic controversy, given the anti-Donatist dynamics of his *Pardoner's Tale*; on the other, it is quite obvious why he was prepared to canvass the key concerns only in the most understated and oblique of ways, and make game of earnest.

When, in the late Middle Ages, both “orthodox” and “heterodox” thinkers addressed the problematic relationship between the office and the office-holder—which, as we have seen, manifested itself in a particularly troubling form in respect of authorizing the confection of the Eucharist—they were taking over and accentuating concerns of long standing, which had troubled men and women for centuries; Lollardy had no monopoly on such matters. Chaucer himself treats elsewhere of men whose deviant personal lives are in conflict with their high office, most notably in the *Summoner's Tale*. Here an unlearned churl gets the better of a learned friar who has abused his learning for personal gain. The tale ends with a secular court of appeal ironically praising the “subtiltee / And heigh wit” of the churl: “He nys no fool” (III(D) 2290–92). In *Piers Plowman* William Langland returns over and over again to the themes of learned ignorance and ignorant learning, the most elaborate instance being the portrayal of

the Doctor of Divinity as a glutton for learning who refused to feed the poor with it (B XIII.25–178).¹⁹⁰ That *pinguis*¹⁹¹ is as offensive as Chaucer's Pardoner, though not in quite the same way; the deviancy of Chaucer's character involves a lot less learning, but such learning as he does have is deployed to comparably evil effect. Similarly, Langland's *Studie* attacks those corrupt clerks who

dryvele at hir deys the deitee to knowe,
And gnawen God with the gorge whanne hir guttes fullen. . .
God is muche in the gorge of thise grete maistres,
Ac amonges meene men his mercy and hise werkes. (B X.56–67)

In the controversial "Tearing of the Pardon" episode a priest who knows Latin but lacks spiritual insight is contrasted with the uneducated but devout plowman who, as it were, was taught his A.B.C. by Abstinence (B VII.105–43).¹⁹² *Piers the Plowman* is said to have proved all "sciences" to be of little worth save love alone (B XIII.124), and theology itself is defined as being "no science sothly bote a sothfaste bileue" (C XI.132). In these lines may be detected an echo of the scholastic debates on the nature of theology, in which one school of thought held that theology is not truly a science in the Aristotelian sense of the term but based on will and affectivity, a matter of faith rather than reason and love rather than intellect.¹⁹³ But there is, of course, no suggestion that ignorant learning or a lack of charity in any way devalues the official function which such men may perform as doctors, preachers, or priests. The texts here quoted steer well clear of any Donatist implication.

The same may be said of the compelling distinction between three parts or degrees of salvation found in *The Scale of Perfection* of Walter Hilton (d. 1396), who may have been involved in the proceedings against Nottinghamshire Lollards. The first part consists in knowledge of God and spiritual subjects, the second consists principally in loving God and does not depend upon intellection, and the third and highest degree consists in both knowledge and love, that is, in knowing God and loving Him perfectly. The first part may be attained by the just and the unjust alike, Hilton believes. Thanks to the general gift of reason that God has given to every man, some "lettred men and grete clerkes" may by "longe studé and travaile in Hooli Writ comen to this knowynge, more or lesse." Now, "this knowyng is good," and indeed "it may be called a partie of contemplacioun in as mykil as it is a sight of soothfastnesse and knowynge of goostli thynges." Nevertheless, it is "but a figure and schadewe" of true contemplation, because it has neither "gosteli savoure in God" nor "inwarde swetnesse of love," which may be felt only by someone who is in great charity. And, given that this first part of knowledge may "be had withoute charité," it "is comone to gode and to bade."¹⁹⁴ Indeed, Hilton continues, heretics,

hypocrites and men who live “fleisschly” are sometimes more knowledgeable than many true Christians although they do not possess this love. St. Paul is writing about the knowledge of such men when he says: “If I had full knowledge of all things and knew all secrets, but had no love, I should be nothing” (I Corinthians 13:2).¹⁹⁵ Mere intellectual ability, cleverness alone, need not have anything to do with those qualities which are conducive to salvation.

One of the most strident opponents of the Lollards, Bishop Reginald Pecock, addressed the same issues in a far more risky way, with the role of reason being radically upgraded. His reaction against the Wycliffites’ grounding of so much of their belief on personal purity and godly living led him to the other extreme, the doctrine that human reason rather than holy Scripture is the ultimate source and arbiter of all moral conduct.¹⁹⁶ Responding to the Lollard claim that every humble-minded Christian man or woman shall without fail arrive at the true sense of every passage of Scripture, Pecock declares that “open experience” shows that a bad clerk may be as good a commentator on Scripture as a good one. Indeed, a vicious man may be a *better* expositor than a virtuous one, since the ability to expound well varies with the intellectual, not with the volitional and affective, power of the mind:

For to fynde the verri and iust vndirstonding of processis in Holi Writt is a labour of the witt or of the intellect, or of resoun in biholding aboute the circumstauncis of the proces and in resonynge ther upon; and for to be good and holi is a labour of the wil or of the affecte or of the appetite: but so it is, that a badde man and a ful yuel disposid man in wil and in affect mai haue so cleer and so weel disposid witt and reson into alle thingis to be founde bi witt, as hath a good man weel disposid in maners of his affect and wil: wherefore folewith bi resoun, that as soone may a viciose man come to and fynde the dew vndirstonding of Holy Scripture, how soone mai a vertuose man finde, so that thei ben lijk witti in nature, or so that the viciose man haue a cleerer witt than the vertuose man hath.

For a moment he sounds rather like Chaucer’s Pardoner. In both cases we hear the voice of the man who elevates *scientia* (“science,” “knowledge”) and *ars* (“art,” “professional skill”) over right “affecte” and correct moral disposition. But Chaucer’s text resolutely remains within the boundaries of orthodoxy, however much it discloses an awareness of dangerous alternatives. Pecock’s extreme rationalism, in marked contrast, was condemned in 1458; he narrowly escaped the flames, though his books did not.

It may be concluded, then, that the type of the deviant preacher, as found in scholastic debates and various types of priest’s handbook, was Chaucer’s fundamental model for the Pardoner. He used it to develop the stereotype of the deviant pardoner, as castigated with depressing regularity by popes and bishops who sought, in vain, to keep the practice of distributing indulgences from wandering too far

from the noble theory which justified it—theory which celebrated the superabundant generosity of superiors to inferiors, of saints to sinners, in the dispensation of merit from the heavenly treasury. We are faced with a preacher who is apparently not deficient in general intelligence or special skills, but blatantly lacking in respect of motive, of objective or *finis*, and ultimately of love. Chaucer makes this figure reveal his sin so openly that the traditional escape-clause, that an evil preacher can do good providing his sin is secret, is of no avail. The Pardoner then tells a tale which, judged by many standards, including late-medieval standards of exemplary narrative technique, is a virtuoso performance. The worst of men has given us the best of stories. Although its moral impact is ruined in this instance and hence does not produce the unworthy result which the Pardoner invariably seeks (financial reward for himself), the morality of the tale itself seems to have survived the immorality of its teller. Chaucer's eucharistic imagery serves this end rather than subverting it; the prospect of pollution which it holds out is never, it seems to me, allowed to overwhelm the tale.

The *Pardoner's Prologue and Tale* promotes belief in the transcendence of *vita* by *verba*, brilliantly conveying the power of the disembodied word. The same issue is treated in a different but related way in the *Prioress's Prologue and Tale*. There a young Christian child sings a Marian hymn, the *alma redemptoris*, which he has learned "by rote," with only a very basic understanding of what the words mean (VII(B2) 523–45): one may recall how the Pardoner also admits that what he preaches has been learned off "by rote" (VI(C) 332). Incensed by his twice-daily performance, a demonized community of Jews, as the villains of the piece, put the *litel clergeon* to death. However, the Blessed Virgin herself commends his innocent incomprehension—a striking case of the spirit being preferred to the letter—by returning his gift of song, despite the fact that his throat has been cut unto the "nekke boon" (VII(B2) 649), so that the *alma redemptoris* may be heard once more. Less dramatically, Thomas of Chobham had argued that certain *inferiores* in the church (deacons and subdeacons) can preach even though they do not understand anything they are saying. They can read the Epistles or Gospels publicly to the people, and such reading is, according to one exposition, "speaking in tongues" (cf. I Corinthians 14:2).¹⁹⁷ As far as medieval congregations were concerned, of course few of their lay members could follow the Latin liturgy, but that was not seen as devaluing their involvement in the Mass—indeed, various strategies of participation were promoted, including the practice whereby parishioners prayed for the priest while he was going about the holy work of confecting the *corpus Christi*, thereby doing their humble best to help ensure a successful

The Prioress, as a woman “wayk” of “konnyng” (VII(B2) 481) who is very aware of her inferiority to “men of dignitee” (456), valorizes her “storie” by establishing a connection between herself and the seven-year-old *clergeon* whose words soar above his lowly childish life and uneducated existence. Furthermore, she likens herself to an even younger child, “of twelf month oold, or lesse, / That kan unnethes any word expresse” (484–85). That is her own situation: “Right so fare I” (486). Any power or merit which her words may have comes not from personal “konnyng” but from higher authority, the “blisful queene” of heaven who, she prays, will guide her song. The Prioress’s body is, so to speak, not an issue; her corporeal, trivializing concerns—including attention to the minutiae of table-manners, interest in “cheere of court” and sentimental feelings for small creatures—are left behind as she speaks in heartfelt praise of the “mayde Mooder free” (467). By contrast, in the *Wife of Bath’s Prologue and Tale* we encounter female figures who perform their doctrine with confidence and comprehension. Here the female body is to the fore: Alisoun revels in her own corporeality, sometimes to the point of grossness, while her alter-ego, a version of the *vetula*-figure so frequently demeaned in medieval literature, configures in a particularly acute way crucial relationships between body and soul, social and spiritual nobility (or *gentillesse*), and moral words and moral character.

Before embarking on a consideration of those issues, however, it remains to investigate one final way in which the Pardoner may be regarded as deviant, this being the issue which has dominated recent analysis of Chaucer’s construct. Does the General Prologue’s comparison of the Pardoner to a “geldyng or a mare” (I(A) 691) contain vital clues about his sexuality and how it is written on his body? Do those clues demand the excavation of a hidden, private sexual life? If the Pardoner is indeed “queer” in some way (a term which has been used both narrowly to denote homosexual preference and comprehensively to implicate a vast array of strangeness), how important is this secret deviancy in relation to his blatantly public deviancies?

In search of answers to those questions, the following section must move away from the *modus procedendi* of medieval intellectual history, as followed hitherto, to address vital concerns of contemporary literary criticism, and share the terms of reference in which they have been couched. Given the complexity of the issues involved, some preliminary clarifications must be made. First and foremost, I do not want to be misread as dismissing the possibility of homoerotic interpretation of Chaucer’s Pardoner, as formulated in a series of studies published from 1980 onward. Rather I accept such

interpretation as a definite possibility—though with the caveat that (in at least one tradition of medieval thought) no sharp distinction was maintained between heterosexual lust and homosexual lust. Lust was lust, the latter manifestation being seen as an extreme version of the former. In other words, a man who could not control his excessive desire was deemed capable of committing reprehensible acts both “natural” and “unnatural.” Furthermore, many other kinds of sexual deviancy may be attributed to the Pardoner—including heterosexual deviancy. For, as an *ecclesiaste* (albeit of lowly status), he should certainly not be womanizing in the way he describes; such behavior (assuming for the moment that we are supposed to believe the relevant boast) deviates from the ideals of his actual profession of *quaestor* and his assumed office of preacher. Turning from his “published” sexual deviancy to the secret sexual deviancy which recent criticism has sought out, here, once again, it may be noted that homosexuality is not the only possible interpretive option. For the Pardoner may be read as a “eunuch” of some kind, as I will argue with reference to medical, moral, and legal theories which throw light on his feminoid appearance and allow us to speculate about the physical capabilities Chaucer had in mind for him. Although I have developed this particular reading at some length (substantially updating an argument originally put forward by Walter Clyde Curry in 1926) I do not regard it as necessarily trumping all the others. In fact, my purpose is to leave the question open—a decision which, I feel, is inevitable, and not only because Chaucer’s text has given us so little to work on (though that also is true). The more compelling reason is the sophistication of medieval thought about the constitution and corporeal markings of gender. At the risk of sounding offensively “queerer than thou,” I would venture the suggestion that some of the “queer” Pardoners we have been offered thus far are just not queer enough.

IV. *GELDYNG OR MARE*: THE DEVIANT BODY

At the beginning of her highly influential 1980 article “The Pardoner’s Homosexuality and How It Matters,” Monica McAlpine remarked that “the possibility that the Pardoner may be a ‘mare’ is often ignored in favor of the belief that he is certainly a ‘geldyng,’ or eunuch”; she sought to restore the balance by offering a detailed argument “in favor of viewing the Pardoner as a possible homosexual.”¹⁹⁹ The situation has now been reversed: recently it is the case for the Pardoner’s homosexuality which has been put most vigorously.

The English term “homosexual” does not appear until 1869, and it has been argued that the notion of homosexual *identity*—as opposed to

homosexual *behavior*—arose long after the Middle Ages (though there is disagreement about exactly *when*). The general procedural problems of historicist inquiry into this matter may be illustrated with reference to Craig A. Williams's book on *Roman Homosexuality*.²⁰⁰ This study makes it clear that Roman mores were very far from contemporary constructions of homosexuality and indeed of heterosexuality. A different binary operated, between “*men*, the penetrators, as opposed to anyone else, the penetrated. The penetrated *other* included women, boys, and slaves; adult Roman men who displayed a desire to be penetrated were consequently labelled deviants and anomalies.”²⁰¹ A major concomitant of these cultural values was that “men were not encouraged to make any meaningful distinctions between homosexual and heterosexual practices as such.”²⁰² And so, the contemporary understanding of “homosexuality” as denoting an exclusive sexual preference and (far more crucially) a distinctive gay identity is simply not in play here; we are faced with major cultural differences and paradigm-shifts. Williams emphasizes this point in explaining the title of his book: he is, he says, “reifying” the concept of homosexuality “only temporarily and for strategic purposes.”²⁰³

A similar “reification” is at work in recent attributions of homosexuality to the Pardoner, though the most perceptive writers on the subject are well aware of the risks of anachronism. In a paper of impressive intellectual ambition which does not shrink from confronting Chaucer's creation as “a self-proclaimed hypocrite and cheat,” Steven Kruger explains that he is not “concerned to ‘prove’ the Pardoner's (indeed unprovable) homosexuality,” but rather “convinced that Chaucer wants us to see, as part of the Pardoner's sexual ‘queerness,’ the *possibility* of homosexuality.”²⁰⁴ This position is underpinned by the core principles of queer theory itself. Within the contemporary academy queer theory now encompasses the study of *diverse* forms of sexual dissidence, each of which calls in question the heterosexual matrix. As Jeffrey Weeks explains, such theory reveals that “sex, gender and desire are not necessarily reducible to the neat binaries of ‘heterosexuality’ and ‘homosexuality’”; it functions as a powerful reminder of “the perpetual inventiveness of a collective sexual politics which stretches towards different ways of being.”²⁰⁵ However, “queerness paradoxically remains in danger of keeping firmly in place the very structure it seeks to overthrow,” in defining itself “broadly against a blanket notion of heteronormativity.”²⁰⁶ Given the large number of tears and tangles in the late-medieval “blanket notion of heteronormativity,” such a danger should hold few fears for Chaucerians: to locate the Pardoner on one side or other of the binary divide is to travesty the complexity and contestation of his constituent discourses. But risks there certainly are. Claiming the Pardoner as a

gay man (with the Host being outed as a homophobic ancestor, due to his words at VI(C) 946–55) may imply an essentializing of “his” sexuality—and such essentializing is precisely what queer theory has set out to challenge and disrupt. Rather, the Pardoner’s “corporeal signification,” to borrow a term from Judith Butler,²⁰⁷ can—and should—be read in irreducibly different ways. And such reading is effectively underpinned by the fluidity of many of the crucial medieval categories.

That fluidity will now be illustrated, with reference to medical and moral doctrines in which an explanation of the Pardoner’s deviant body may be sought. First, the case that it is the result of some sort of eunuchry may be re-opened. It is generally accepted that, had the Pardoner been forcibly castrated, Chaucer would have informed us of that defining moment in his character’s “life.” Walter Clyde Curry’s landmark discussion of the Pardoner’s sexuality compares him to men who had been gelded but identifies the Pardoner himself as a *eunuchus a nativitate* or congenital eunuch.²⁰⁸ However, it now seems clear that the notion of congenital eunuchry could accommodate many physical conditions, ranging from people who had been castrated or had a sexually debilitating “birth defect”—undescended or small testicles,²⁰⁹ hermaphroditism imagined or actual.²¹⁰ My term “actual” designates people with the distinct anatomical condition which nowadays is sometimes termed “intersexuality.”²¹¹ The term “eunuch” could also be applied to men who had been rendered “effeminate” and hence mare-like by some other medical cause. On one theory, if sperm from the right-side testicle lodged in the left side of the uterus, a womanly male would issue (ideally, such sperm should lodge in the right side of the uterus, producing a manly man); an alternative theory held that fetuses which develop in the middle of the uterus are hermaphroditic, possessing both male and female qualities.²¹² Any of the conditions listed here, it would seem, could be responsible for such aspects of the Pardoner’s physical appearance as glaring eyes and beardlessness (cf. I(A) 684, 689–90).

Alternatively, the Pardoner’s body may be regarded as the product of a particular combination of the humors. Women are naturally cold and humid, whereas men are hot and dry, declares (pseudo-)Aristotle in the *Problemata*.²¹³ However, as Peter of Abano explains in his commentary on this text, if a man should have a cold and humid complexion, he will be womanlike in nature and behavior.²¹⁴ The problems of such men are explained graphically by “Aristotle”: like girls during puberty, they are sexually “insatiable” because they are unable to emit enough seed, and so they constantly desire *coitus*.²¹⁵ Cold can, it seems, attack normative masculinity in many ways. If a man’s testes are naturally cold, says Constantine the African, he tends

toward effeminacy and his hair growth is inhibited.²¹⁶ According to “Aristotle,” “neither eunuchs nor women are hairy, because of their great moisture,”²¹⁷ whereas a man “grows hair when he begins to be capable of sexual intercourse.”²¹⁸ Indeed, abundant hair-growth is evidence of virility, a point elaborated by Evrart de Conty, physician to King Charles V of France (and translator into French of the *Problemata* with material from Abano’s commentary).²¹⁹ In his *Le Livre des Eschez amoureux moralisés* Evrart explains that the beard, *inter alia*, marks the distinction between the sexes and separates men from women more easily;²²⁰ it shows man’s great dignity (*grant dignité*) and powerful heat (*chaleur vertueuse*) and makes known his generative power. “And so wise philosophers say that animals which have more hair, and birds that have more feathers,” than others of their kind “are more potent (*poissans*) than others.”²²¹ There are aesthetic considerations also: “The beard looks very good on men and is an honest and beautiful thing.” In contrast, Nature “ordained no beard at all for women, for it would be repugnant to their complexion, which is cold compared to that of men.” Relating all this to the Pardoner, it is important to note that he did not have to be a *castratus*, or indeed any kind of eunuch at all, to lack the capacity to grow a beard; a cold and humid complexion in general, and cold testicles in particular, would have done the trick. Furthermore, hairy men were horny men, but a *lack* of facial hair could also indicate strong desire, due to the tendency of men with cold and humid complexions to suffer from trapped semen. That having been said, however, if we wish to return to the idea of the “eunuch” (on our inclusive definition), we can do no better than enlist the help of Razi, as translated by Gerard of Cremona, who asserts that “a man who has not been castrated but was born without testicles or with very small ones” looks “like a eunuch, that is, he never grows a beard.”²²²

Running in parallel with those medical discourses was a moral one: the excessive love of women made a man effeminate. In his argument for “The Sexual Normality of Chaucer’s Pardoner”²²³ Richard Firth Green offers *inter alia* the example of the lustful Assyrian king, Sardanapalus, who, according to Gower’s *Confessio amantis*, was so beset with the fiery “rage of love” that he quite unmanned himself, became a fish out of water:

he so rioteth,
And wax so ferforth wommannyssh,
That ayein kinde, as if a fisch
Abide wolde upon the lond,
In wommen such a lust he fond (VII, 4318–22)

A less drastic moral condition was that of the effeminate man who is sexually capable but unsuccessful, an obvious case being furnished by

Absolon in the *Miller's Tale*, with whom the Pardoner has much in common. It is no coincidence that in the fifteenth-century continuation of the *Canterbury Tales* known as the *Canterbury Interlude* (which prefaces the *Merchant's Tale of Beryn*), the pardoner's character has been developed with features derived from Chaucer's Absolon.²²⁴ The *Beryn*-poet's pardoner is sexually *capable* and heterosexually lecherous, but fails miserably in his attempt to seduce Kit the barmaid. Perhaps the later poet found in Chaucer's construct a man whose pride in his sexual prowess far exceeded his actual achievement. This figure, then, is certainly in possession of testicles; rather the point is that, like Absolon, he is unmanly in respect of his failed sexual performance—here is the locus of his inadequacy, and the reason why he is an appropriate target for insults of a type which call his manhood in question.²²⁵ This portrayal is clearly consonant with Chaucer's account of the Pardoner who desires a jolly wench in every town (VI(C) 453) and who asks the Wife of Bath to teach “us yonge men” some practical philosophy in the art of love (III(D) 186–87). For the purpose of this particular argument, size doesn't matter—though small success in love might be taken as implying small testicles, and a feminoid appearance and manners could, within the economy of the narrative, bode ill for a man's chances in love.

It may be concluded, then, that the possibilities for “queer” readings of the Pardoner's sexuality are many and various. Judith Butler writes: “If the term ‘queer’ is to be a site of collective contestation, the point of departure for a set of historical considerations, and futural imaginings, it will have to remain that which is, in the present, never fully owned, but always and only redeployed, twisted, queered from a prior usage.”²²⁶ The following reading of Chaucer's character as a (possible, problematic) eunuch is offered as such a redeployment. One of the main stumbling blocks to this approach has, of course, been the Pardoner's own womanizing claims (VI(C) 453) and his assertion to the Wife of Bath that he plans to wed a wife (III(D) 163–68). Proponents of the “eunuch” theory—and indeed, advocates of the “homosexual” theory—have had to read these passages as mere bluster and bravado, designed to mask the Pardoner's actual physical condition or alternatively to get a laugh from the Canterbury pilgrims who have drawn their own conclusions about his sexual impotence (if he is a eunuch) or his sexual preferences (if he has homosexual tendencies). But according to at least one body of contemporary opinion, a eunuch—on certain definitions of the condition in question—was deemed capable of marriage, both physically and legally. That is the main thrust of the following argument which, far from attempting to reclaim Chaucer's construct as heterosexually normative, seeks to question the

assumptions constituting “normativity” within critical debate on the Pardoner’s sexuality.

Chaucer and the Queering Eunuch

There was a general assumption that possession of testicles is essential to maleness. For instance, Arnold of Villanova (who produced a substantial number of medical treatises at Montpellier in the 1290s) quoted “the ancients” as believing that the testicles were the principal organs inasmuch as they supplied the *virtus* (virility, power) of the whole body.²²⁷ Peter of Spain (who taught medicine at Sienna during the period 1246–50) declares that, while “sexual desire” (*desiderum in coitu*) comes from the liver, the “act of love is in the testicles” and the natural “stimulation to intercourse” is located “in one member, and this is in the testicles.”²²⁸ Little wonder, then, that castration or genital deficiency was deemed a major threat to male integrity and identity. And yet—throughout the Middle Ages castration normally meant the removal of the testicles but not the penis, *pace* the assumptions of some recent discussions of Chaucer’s Pardoner.²²⁹ Therefore eunuchs retained feelings of sexual desire—they could have penile erections, and indeed there was a view (here exemplified by the words of St. John Chrysostom) that “far from assuaging the lusts of the flesh,” castration “exacerbates them.”²³⁰ One may also recall here Shakespeare’s eunuch Mardian (a *castratus*), who has “fierce affections” and thinks lasciviously of “what Venus did with Mars” (*Antony and Cleopatra*, act 1, sc. 5).

The belief was certainly current that a man who was deprived of his testicles, or who had lacked them at birth, was incapable of fathering a child. But, given that “eunuchs” generally retained their penises (and once again we must emphasize that “eunuchry” could include such medical conditions as undescended or “abnormal” testicles), some authorities actually believed that they *were* capable of semination. Furthermore, given that in “eunuchs” the capacity for sexual intercourse remained, was that not sufficient to satisfy at least one of the reasons for marriage, irrespective of whether they were capable of begetting children or not? In his *Sentences* Peter Lombard defined two *causae matrimonii*, the procreation of children and (following the Fall from Eden) the provision of a “remedy” (*remedium*) for concupiscence,²³¹ the point being that, as St. Paul said, it was better to marry than to burn (I Corinthians 7:9): the institution functioned to control and contain sexual desire. Was it not better, then, for lustful “eunuchs” to marry? After all, the marriage of old and sterile men had been defended, by St. Augustine and many others. Some passages in the *Decretales* of Pope Gregory IX suggest that it is the *potentia coeundi* (the physical capacity for intercourse) which is

required of both partners, not the *potentia generandi*.²³² On this argument, if a given “eunuch” was capable of the former, it might be concluded that there was no impediment in canon law to his marriage.

Considerable controversy came to center on the issue of whether the ejaculate of “eunuchs” was “valid” (*validum semen*, later termed *verum semen*, “true seed”).²³³ Predictably, the discussion was plagued by terminological confusion and failure to make clear distinctions between the different kinds of condition which fell under the general definition of “eunuchry.” But the central issue was clear enough: might the marriage debt be paid by penile emission of a kind which could not result in pregnancy? Opinion was, of course, divided. Guido de Baysio (“Archidiaconus”; d. 1313) rules out marriage for a man lacking both testicles on the grounds that both the *causa prolis* and the *causa vitandae fornicationis* must be satisfied;²³⁴ similar views are expressed by Aegidius Bellamera (d. 1392).²³⁵ Raymond of Peñafort’s treatment is indecisive,²³⁶ while Hostiensis promotes the “one testicle” theory, i.e., the notion that a man with only one testicle may marry,²³⁷ presumably because this enables him to produce true seed. Dominicus de Soto (1492–1560) took it as an “infallible and most certain rule” that a man who is incapable of semination is incapable of marriage, but his understanding of “semination” is not altogether clear, and it has been suggested that he means seed of *any* kind, including seed which lacked the power to impregnate.²³⁸

Indeed, even among the many voices raised in support of the notion that a man lacking both testicles may contract marriage there was some disagreement as to whether he must have the ability to emit true seed. In his *Summa super Decretum*, Hugutio of Pisa (d. 1210) suggests that marriage can be contracted by a man who emits semen even though it may not be suitable for generation.²³⁹ Joannes Teutonicus (d. 1245), glossing Gratian, begins by seeming to deny the possibility of eunuchs marrying, but later states that erection and penetration are important, rather than semination.²⁴⁰ The same opinion was held by Michael Medina (d. 1578)²⁴¹ and Bartholomaeus Ugolinus (d. 1610).²⁴²

A particularly full account is provided in the *Sentences* commentary of Peter of la Palud, who contrasts the *act* and the *effect* of generation (the latter meaning the procreation of children).²⁴³ Thanks to this distinction, Peter can easily support the marriage of old men who lack the capacity to impregnate their partners. As far as castrates and “spadones” are concerned, if a man is incapable of both the act and the effect, no marriage can take place. Marriage is quite possible, however, for a man who can have an erection (*virga erigitur*) and perform the sexual act even though the seed which he produces is “invalid.” If a man has an erection but is incapable of emitting seed,

then he may be able to deflower a virgin (here Peter quotes Ecclesiasticus 20:2) but he cannot marry. St. Antoninus of Florence (1389–1458) follows la Palud in singling out as the crucial factor the emission of seed, even though it is *invalidum ad generandum*.²⁴⁴

Support for the view that erection and penetration are the crucial factors is afforded by one of the opinions considered by the Franciscan Richard of Middleton, during discussion of the question, may an unconsummated marriage be dissolved because a man's genitals have been cut off?²⁴⁵ “Some say” that such marriages can indeed be dissolved for this reason, the strongest version of the argument being that, when both penis and testicles are removed, this is sufficient reason for the dissolution of an unconsummated marriage. However, Richard continues, it's a different story if the testicles are removed but the penis remains. For it may be said that, as long as the man can have an erection, this suffices for matrimony, whether or not he emits sperm. A woman may be satisfied by penetration alone, whether the man emits sperm or not, and within marriage the hope of offspring need not be in mind all the time.²⁴⁶

Here, one might say, is some good news for the Pardoner: even if he is a “eunuch” he would be capable of contracting marriage, according to a substantial body of contemporary opinion. Hence there is no reason to dismiss either his lust for a wench in every town or his professed desire to marry as screens for physical and legal impossibilities. Whatever else is doubtful about the Pardoner, we can allow him his penis—and that, in the minds of many, was sufficient to allow such a man to marry, no matter whether he had small testicles, just one (of whatever size), or none at all. Others would have insisted on his ability to produce (some sort of) seed. More good news: many thinkers believed that “eunuchs” could do just that.

I am *not*, however, suggesting that the definitive answer to the problem of the Pardoner's sexuality is to read him as a “heterosexual eunuch.” Much of the above material could, of course, be used in a claiming of the Pardoner as either a “homosexual” or a “bisexual” eunuch. My purpose has been to present yet another possibility, in support of Donald Howard's view (or at least part of Howard's view) that our Pardoner is “an enigma” who resists reduction to a single sexual identity or to one set of sexual preferences.²⁴⁷ As Glenn Burger and Steven Kruger say, “Historical work itself has written out or over what might have been queer, unstable, nonnormative in medieval sex and culture.”²⁴⁸ I submit that consideration of the Pardoner's deviant body in view of the range of conditions covered by “eunuchry” in Chaucer's day can help to restore a sense of such instabilities.

To summarize the state of play so far: the Pardoner may be seen as a man (1) who has undescended or abnormal testicles, or (2) who was

generated on the left side or in the middle of his mother's womb. Either condition, it would seem, was capable of producing a feminoid appearance, involving such features as glaring eyes and beardlessness. Shifting the principles of categorization somewhat, three further possibilities may be added, once again from our previous discussion: (3) a man could become effeminate due to his excessive sexual desire for women, (4) a man who looked like a woman was likely to have his masculinity called in question, and (5) the same was true of the man who lusted after women but was dismally unsuccessful in his pursuit of them. None of these five situations or conditions necessarily involved anything other than heterosexual normativity (but already an elastic definition of "normativity" is being assumed here). This could be said to apply even in the case of the congenital "eunuch" who was seen as capable of heterosexual (and presumably homosexual) desire and legally entitled to marry—though much depended on which canon lawyer or theologian one talked to.

Moving the argument a stage further, it may be noted that *any* of these possibilities could give rise to jokes about the protagonist "lacking balls," and hence being like a *geldyng* or a *mare*, the semantic common denominator between the two terms being exploited here.²⁴⁹ Recent discussions of the dynamics of insult in the Pardoner's portrait have tended to focus on (allegedly) homophobic verbal abuse. But there are other possibilities. The following extracts from a poem by the thirteenth-century *jongleur* Gautier le Leu provide an excellent point of departure for an exploration of some of them.

Nos avons çaiens un bruhier,
un durfeüt, un hebohet.
Ahi! Con Damerdex me het
qui fui des bons vallés aquiuis,
et des cortois et des gentius,
si pris cest caitif par nature. . . .
Et cis ribaus me tient plus vil
que le femier de son cortil,
mais je sai bien, par Saint Eloi,
qu'il n'est mie de bone loi,
ains est de çaus del Mont Wimer:
il n'a soing de dames amer. (398–403, 425–30)²⁵⁰

[What have we here ? An impotent, n'er-do-well, a wretch! Ah me! The Lord God must hate me! That I, who disdained fine young men, who were well born and courteous, should then take up with this congenital weakling!. . . This scoundrel shows me less regard than he does the dungheap in his barnyard. But I know well, by Saint Loy, that his morals are no better than that of those on Mount Wimer. He doesn't care about loving women.]²⁵¹

Montwimer was perhaps the oldest Catharist center in France and certainly the principal one in the country north of the Loire. In May 1239 about one hundred and eighty heretics were burned there, accusations of homosexuality having figured in the charges against

them. But this poem is far from being an account of how a man emulates those heretics by preferring sex with men to intercourse with the woman who is railing against him here. The point is rather that the sexual desires of this widow-woman are insatiable; no new partner can please her, no matter how hard he tries—and that particular poor *caitif* has tried long and hard. “Lady, you have a greedy mouth in you that too often demands to be fed. It has tired my poor old war-horse out. I’ve just withdrawn him all shrunken and sore. One cannot work so much without getting weary and limp.”²⁵² In this poem, which elaborates antifeminist clichés about the prodigious sexual appetites of widows,²⁵³ the coded accusation of homosexuality functions as a means of insulting the hapless male’s virility, rather than as a matter-of-fact declaration of his impotence, let alone of any actual sexual deviancy. The man (identified as young, and hence at his sexual peak) is unambiguously and actively heterosexual, but not man enough for the ball-breaking *veuve*.

By the same token, *geldyng* and *mare* are neither literal description nor scientific definition—but meant to be insulting. And in insult there frequently is some crucial distance between the offensive accusation and the actuality (indeed, in many cases the degree of insult seems to be in direct proportion to the distance—the farther the better). How best to call a man’s virility in question because he is *either* very interested in women but effeminate in appearance (perhaps due to that very interest) *or* because his heterosexual achievements never quite live up to his own high opinion of his womanizing skills? This could be done simply and effectively by characterizing him as a man with no balls—a gelding or a mare, indeed. The idea of castration is obviously evoked there, and if “mare” should carry the suggestion of homosexuality, so much the better—because the insult is all the stronger. But this does not mean, of course, that the individual in question is actually lacking his physical equipment or does not know how to use it properly (according to medieval norms); to suppose that would be to misunderstand what kind of language is in use here, to miss the point of the mockery. The constituent discourses of effeminacy have been enlisted in the service of caricature. A form of caricature which (on this argument) should not be mistaken for the homophobic mockery of one who smells a gay pardoner in the wind.

Furthermore, we must concede the existence of actions which are so horrendous that no insult, however ugly or literally inaccurate, seems too nasty to be hurled at their perpetrators. There is a long-established tradition of using sexual slurs to strike at deviancies of a kind which have little if anything to do with sexuality. Generations of British schoolchildren have known that

Has only got one ball,
Goering
Has two, but they are small.
Himmler
Has something similar,
But Goebbels
Has no balls
At all!

This (anonymous, of course) song, sung to the tune of the “Colonel Bogey” march, dates from the period 1939/40, when Britain faced invasion and cultural annihilation by Hitler’s forces; within that historical context, its acerbic humor is quite understandable. More recent parallels are not hard to find. According to the *British News of the World* (4 November 2001), America’s public enemy number one, Osama bin Laden, once lived a “degenerate” life, being “forced to pay hookers to satisfy his cravings because he was a sexual inadequate.” His rage against the United States is said to stem from the humiliating reaction of an American woman, who laughed when she saw his “minuscule sexual organs.” Another newspaper published on the same day, the *Mail on Sunday*, assured its readers that “Mohammad Atta and at least five” of the other September 11th hijackers “were secretly gay.”²⁵⁴ “Demonization” this may be termed, but that sounds like a weasel word if the people subjected to that process are genuinely guilty of appalling atrocities. Who cares about offending the sensibilities of a Hitler or a bin Laden? On the logic of this argument, then, no insult directed against the Pardoner can be too offensive, no slur too extreme, given his utter lack of moral scruples and disgusting greed for material reward. He is deeply objectionable for reasons quite apart from his sexuality. But demeaning reference to that sexuality (however understood) is an effective if crude way of expressing well-founded disapproval. Hence the Chaucer-persona’s crack, “I trowe he were a geldyng or a mare,” in the *General Prologue*; hence Harry Bailly’s homophobic insult at the end of the *Pardoner’s Tale*. Sexual slurs are being used to express anger which has arisen from other causes.

And yet: such righteous indignation need not destroy the thought that however morale-boosting colorful claims of the kind illustrated above may be, they give a bad name to physical conditions and sexualities which are perceived as non-normative. The very terms of reference which are drawn upon in such publicly sanctioned verbal abuse bring out the deep-seated intolerances of that public.²⁵⁵ They depend on an assumption that out there are groups of (supposedly) deficient or deviant people who really perform the “unmanly” or “unnatural” actions which the discourse of insult implicates. Which is, of course, utterly regrettable. But the Pardoner’s relationship to one or other of those groups remains problematic. And the matter cannot be

resolved through reference to his terminal exchange with Harry Bailly. There are several possible motives apart from homophobia for the Host's verbal assault on the Pardoner. Harry has just been singled out, in front of all his fellow-pilgrims, as the person among them who is most enveloped in sin. And throughout the Pardoner's narrative the profession of innkeeper has been disparaged (cf. the argument on pp. 131–32 above). If the tavern is the devil's church, what does that make Harry Bailly? Here, surely, are sufficient grounds for taking offense.

Furthermore, there is, in my view, nothing distinctively or conclusively homophobic about the Host's language. If the Pardoner's claim about his rampant philandering (VI(C) 453) is taken at face value, then this character's "coillons" would make a prize relic (much sought after as a cure for impotence, if we may pursue this discourse of mock-sainthood a little further!), and the threat of their removal would hit the Pardoner where it really hurts.²⁵⁶ On this reading his sexual pride is the Host's target—a cruel cut indeed. If on the other hand the Pardoner is to be seen as an Absolon-like heterosexual inadequate—or as "lacking balls" in any of the other ways outlined above—then the "relic" in question would be rather a poor specimen, not unlike those tiny fragments of human tissue which have survived in their "seintuaries" to the present day, and their display would reveal just how little physical support the Pardoner's pretensions really have. In short, there is much room for interpretation of the Host's strategy of insult in heterosexual terms.

The Pardoner's alleged "homosexuality" (or inclination to homosexual acts) remains unproved and is (I believe) unprovable. Moreover, it is not even clear—and here the case of the Pardoner parts company with those of the psychopaths mentioned above—if Chaucer meant to raise the specter of homosexuality within his rhetoric of insult. In particular, the sense of *mare* = homosexual has not been established beyond all reasonable doubt in the case of General Prologue I(A) 691, *pace* the *Riverside Chaucer's* over confident gloss, which does not even add the prudent caveat of a question mark.²⁵⁷ The verbal parallels adduced have been few indeed; Walter of Châtillon's complaint about how "men make women of themselves, and stallions become mares (*se mares effeminant et equa fit equus*)," is the most telling.²⁵⁸ This is hardly indicative of a well-established and widely understood meaning. *Mare*, in crucial association with *geldyng*, may simply have the implication of "lacking balls," however metaphorically or literally that may be taken, in line with whichever of the readings outlined above.

Attempts to bolster the interpretation of *mare* as "homosexual" by interpreting the Pardoner's playful escapade with the Summoner in

terms of homoerotic attraction are also, in my view, unconvincing; that passage can be explained by the scenario of “two wild and crazy guys ready for a little fun,” to borrow a phrase from David Benson.²⁵⁹ Engaged in contrapuntal performance of heteronormativity, they sing their litany of mutual priapic prowess, noisily claiming their positions as dominant males in the *olde daunce* of heterosexual love. Reveling in their fantasy of sexual conceit, the Pardoner and Summoner are probably on the brink of homosocial boasting about who can have the most women or piss the highest. “Hoot . . . and lecherous as a sparwe” (I(A) 626), the Summoner seems to be a sexual predator who preys on “The yonge girles of the diocise” (664).²⁶⁰ Furthermore, he is described as “A good felawe to have his concubyn / A twelf month” and then desert her (650–51), the term “good felawe” (as we know from the discussion thereof by “Lollard Knight” Sir John Clanvowe) having currency as a label for a certain kind of urban *bon viveur* who spent a lot of time in taverns and brothels.²⁶¹ Clearly, the Pardoner and he have a lot in common—little wonder that Chaucer should describe him as the Summoner’s “freend” and “compeer” (670). But they seem very far from being “the first recognizable ‘gay couple’ in English literature,” as John Bowers puts it;²⁶² their sexual predilections may well lie elsewhere.

However: Bowers’s queering of the Summoner highlights an issue of the first importance for any consideration of medieval sexual preference. “The sexual axis operative in this culture was defined more precisely as chaste/ lecherous rather than straight/gay, and a lecherous man was thought to have no bounds in the expression of his sexual appetites.”²⁶³ That principle is made very clear in the *Speculum vitae* of William of Nassington (d. 1359),²⁶⁴ which—following the *Somme le Roi*—offers an elaborate hierarchy of fourteen branches of lechery, in ascending order of awfulness.²⁶⁵

Litchery of body als men may here.
It shewes in fourtene braunches sere
After ye state es mare and lesse
Of yam yat dose swilk wretchednes.
Ya braunches springes and waxes vpward
Fra wicke to wers yat ye saul feles hard. (9245–50)²⁶⁶

The fourteenth and worst branch is, quite predictably, sodomy:

Ye fourtened braunche als falles in mynde
Es a foul synne mast agayne kynde,
Ye whilk es ful wlatson to neuen
Yat gretly greues Godde of heuen.
For yat synne Godde had vengeaunce tane
When he did rayne fyre and brunstane
Opon Sodom and on Gomor (9447–53)

Thus Nassington wraps up his discussion of “litchery / Bathe of hert

and of body,” having measured desire in terms of degree rather than of kind. Heretosexual lust is bad, while homosexual lust is very bad—these evils are on one and the same scale, rather than seen as distinct and differentiated.

The widespread nature of that belief is borne in upon us again and again, by a wide range of late-medieval sources. “Remove whores from the world and you will fill it with sodomy,” declares the fourth book of the treatise *De regimine principum* which was, at least in part, authored by Thomas Aquinas;²⁶⁷ here the assumption is that if inordinate sexual desire is denied one outlet it will seek another, irrespective of gender. If no woman is available, a man will have recourse to another man. Having sex with women, then, is by far the lesser evil. One of the radical recommendations of the Lollard *Twelve Conclusions* is that clergymen, who live in luxurious conditions, should be married, to guard them against falling into homosexual practices.²⁶⁸ In *Cleanness*, women are, quite literally, offered in place of men, as substitute objects of desire. When the Sodomites demand that the beautiful angels (described as “myry” young men, with flowing silk-like hair and beardless chins; ll. 783–96) should be handed over to them, Lot offers his daughters in their place.²⁶⁹ Lust, it would seem, is no respecter of persons, or of bodies.

This is far away from any sense of distinctive and defining sexual preference, such as the concept of “gay identity.” What we are dealing with here is a *continuum* of erotic possibility,²⁷⁰ and therefore—to return to Craig Williams’s study—misleading modern binaries should be put “under historical pressure.”²⁷¹ It would be rash, then, to assert that the Pardoner and the Summoner are *incapable* of same-sex unions, either with each other or with other men (though there is no clear evidence, I believe, for the view that Chaucer wanted them to come across as having actually engaged in such behavior or being interested in doing so). Furthermore, this idea of an erotic continuum is paralleled and supported by medieval medical discourses which accept that Nature is eminently capable of producing a wide range of biological configurations: womanly women, manly women, hermaphrodites, womanly men, manly men; men with one, two, or no testicles, with large, medium-sized, or small testicles. . . . Terms such as “normal” and “abnormal,” “heterosexual” and “homosexual,” thus stand revealed as constitutive of inadequate binaries which obscure rather than clarify medieval thought about gender. At the very least we should sustain “a certain ironic distance” from such terms, imagining quotation marks around their every occurrence.²⁷² Chaucer’s Pardoner confounds “the naturalized appearance of gender in its heterosexual guise,” to borrow a phrase from Joseph Bristow’s commentary on Judith Butler.²⁷³ And there are excellent prospects for

a type of queer theory which accepts just how queering the relevant medieval discourses can be—especially when they are freed from the normalizing, binarizing tendencies of other medieval discourses on the one hand, and of much modern scholarship on the other. We should not exaggerate or overplay the cultural status of those queering discourses; the hegemony of heteronormative ideology in Chaucer's day is not to be denied. But neither should they be written out of history, their purchase in current criticism resisted.

Reclaiming Public Deviancy

Whether one throws up one's hands in positivistic frustration at the bewildering abundance of conflicting evidence and argument, or celebrates such abundance as an antidote to reductive and totalizing interpretation, the crucial question remains: does the Pardoner's sexuality, *however* we choose to constitute it, really matter? My own answer is that it does indeed matter, but not in an all-determining and exclusive sense: rather it should be placed within a wider cultural perspective and related to a broader definition of deviancy. Consequently this discussion will now return to investigation of the manner in which Chaucer has presented the Pardoner as a blatantly immoral figure, including the ways in which he abuses his profession as *quaestor* and perverts the apostolic, angelic, and divine *officium praedicatoris*.

To make one thing quite clear at the outset: I am *not* arguing that Chaucer rejected the Pardoner outright; that would be an otiose proposition, given the time and effort the poet lavished on his creation. Chaucer was, I believe, deeply fascinated by the Pardoner as the embodiment of the principle that an immoral man can tell a moral tale—a reflex, I suspect, of his fascination (as I see it) with the power of fiction, which can be used for good or ill.²⁷⁴ But it is, of course, perfectly possible to be fascinated—in sociopolitical, ethical, or aesthetic terms, for instance—by a person or thing which one has no compunction about condemning on moral grounds. Such an attitude can, I would venture, be attributed to Chaucer with regard to the Pardoner. That is, of course, utter speculation, incapable of verification. But what is perfectly clear is that medieval scholasticism had developed sophisticated strategies for analysis, and condemnation, of *conditiones* very similar to, if not identical with, those displayed by the Pardoner. It seems reasonable to draw on them for help.

Despite its many virtues, Walter Clyde Curry's chapter entitled "The Pardoner's Secret" has a lot to answer for. It instituted a critical trend in Chaucer criticism which has proved extraordinarily pervasive and persistent—and from which, I believe, we should now seek

escape. For Curry the Pardoner's secret was eunuchry (understood misleadingly in too narrow a sense); for McAlpine, Kruger, Glenn Burger,²⁷⁵ Allen J. Frantzen,²⁷⁶ and Robert S. Sturges²⁷⁷ it is his possible or actual homosexuality. Consequently the notion of a "screen sin" has emerged: when the Pardoner boasts about avarice (which he preaches against but is enveloped in), and indeed publishes his heterosexual lust, this is supposed to conceal "some graver defect of body or soul or both."²⁷⁸ The fact that Chaucer is silent on that "graver defect" is taken as evidence that he is dealing with the sin that cannot be named;²⁷⁹ as in another great detective mystery, the dog that didn't bark in the night is deemed to make the biggest noise. But: the greed for food and drink, and above all else for money, feature largely, crucially, compellingly in the *Pardoner's Prologue and Tale*. Indeed, there is something quite obsessive (or "criminal," to borrow Howard's term) about the rapacity with which he targets his victims, even the poorest and most vulnerable members of society, showing no recognition whatever of their shared humanity or common membership of the Church's mystical body. Quite apart from the material suffering which the Pardoner can cause, his capacity to perpetrate spiritual harm is immense. What "defect" could be "graver"? Whoever sins secretly kills his own soul, declares Thomas of Chobham, but whoever sins publicly kills his own soul and another's.²⁸⁰ The evil this man does will live long after him. His professional offenses, of which he makes no secret, may therefore be seen as far more important than any secret transgressions. To dismiss or relegate all those public deviances as a mere "screen" merely serves to highlight the gulf between certain medieval and modern moral concerns.

Historical information concerning the rationale and frequency of medieval "pardoning" has vanished deep in that gulf. Symptomatically, McAlpine goes so far as to describe the granting of indulgences as "a theologically marginal church practice."²⁸¹ Presumably no real-life Canterbury pilgrims felt like that, however, as they would have been far less inclined to spend so much time and money in traveling to Canterbury had attractive indulgences not been available there; otherwise they would have gone to Walsingham, Hales, or any other of the major English pilgrimage sites where much supererogatory merit was on offer (and we would now be reading, say, *The Walsingham Tales*). For acquiring indulgences was one of the major reasons—perhaps the major reason—for going on pilgrimage.²⁸² Furthermore, the sheer bulk of late-medieval discussion of the theory and practice of indulgences is staggering; my own discussion has only scratched the surface. And the theology of indulgences was elaborately interwoven with theologies relating to sacred preaching,

the Eucharist, baptism, penance, and absolution—a formidable list, comprising most if not all of the fundamentals of the Catholic faith. The practical problems relating to the issue and distribution of indulgences were many and various, as we have seen; many a high-ranking churchman expended his best efforts in the vain attempt to regulate the system. The communication gap was vast, the room for miscomprehension and simple fraud enormous. Here is perhaps the single most important site on which the spiritual and material economies within medieval Christianity competed. If further proof were needed for this assertion, we need only think of Martin Luther's choice of indulgences as a prime target for reformist outrage.

Hardly a "marginal practice," then. The fact that such concerns have been pushed into the margins of current criticism should not occlude their cultural centrality in Chaucer's England. Those few people who published on the Pardoner *as pardoner*—I am thinking of the landmark studies by Jusserand (1889), Kellogg and Haselmayer (1951), and Arnold Williams (1965)—did their work very well, perhaps creating the impression that there was little else to be said on the matter. But that, of course, does not explain the extent to which the medieval theory and practice of indulgences has been ignored by social and intellectual historians alike. H. C. Lea's 1896 study of auricular confession and indulgences has never been superseded in English; the major monograph in German, by Nikolaus Paulus,²⁸³ dates from 1922/23 and has had little impact on anglophone scholarship. The theology of indulgences was far more complicated (not to say sophisticated) than those above-mentioned Chaucerians allowed, and the blatant Protestant bias which occasionally surfaces in the English scholarship—Lea's work affords many examples—should be recognized as an inhibiting factor. Even more invasive is a generally negative view of indulgences which may derive in at least some measure from the hegemony of the Protestant version of English history (particularly with regard to the Reformation);²⁸⁴ this is hardly conducive to a comprehensive investigation of the consequences of a dogma concerning the heavenly treasury of merit. Scant attention has been paid to the fact that the rationalization of indulgences was a source of considerable anxiety and debate not only between orthodox and heterodox theologians but also among the orthodox theologians themselves,²⁸⁵ who produced the doctrine that was promulgated in Church councils and imposed (with mixed results) on the Christian populace at large. That anxiety and debate merits more regard than it has received hitherto. But there has been little will to engage such issues. "Probably no event in Franciscan history has been so much discussed or more widely commented on than the historical authenticity of the Portiuncula indulgence," Raphael Huber

confidently asserted in 1938.²⁸⁶ And yet, few if any of today's medievalists will recognize many of the "famous authors and contributors to Franciscan literature"²⁸⁷ listed in his roll call of contributors to that controversy over eight centuries. The offer of plenary indulgences during the Jubilee Year of 2000 proved of interest only to some present-day devout Catholics and a few agnostic commentators who attacked what they regarded as a ridiculous vestige of medieval superstition.²⁸⁸ It has not promoted any reconsideration of the Pardoner's profession, or of the value-system within which indulgences had—or have—currency.

"Every time the Pardoner attempts to repair his lack—with relics or documents or words—he points to it."²⁸⁹ But attempts to locate that lack and fill that space (assuming that they exist in the first place) should not sideline those relics and documents and words. The Pardoner is, above all else, a pardoner or fundraiser. That is what he does for a living, that is what (he says) he is good at. For him it goes far beyond just doing a job; he takes real pride in his trade (though he practices it in a deviant form) and his realization of his professional self is central to his performance of subjectivity. Aspects of the Pardoner's self-fashioning which are *not* a secret therefore deserve more attention.

Indeed, it may be said that the Pardoner's problem is not secrecy but the lack of it; we are dealing with an abundance of information, not a deficit. He publishes his greed, pride, and vainglory openly, indeed reveling in their revelation—these are not "screen sins" but blatant, offensive moral deviancies. Thus Chaucer presents a problem which had troubled generations of churchmen in an extraordinarily in-your-face way. Some preach for the cupidity of earthly reward or the desire for human applause, declares Thomas of Chobham. The Pardoner is guilty on both those counts, and therefore (following Chobham's application of II Corinthians 2:17) may be described as an adulterer of the word of God.²⁹⁰ Just as an adulterer does not seek the fruit of offspring but solely carnal pleasure, the adulterer of the word of God does not seek what profits souls but merely the pleasure of wealth or of vainglory. His doctrine may be of some benefit to others, but he does not learn from it himself and therefore incurs the condemnation of St. Paul: "Thou therefore that teachest another, teachest not thyself: thou, that preachest that men should not steal, stealest. Thou, that sayest men should not commit adultery, committest adultery" (Romans 2:21–23). The force of those words may be felt and respected without, I hope, falling into some nostalgic fantasy about the Middle Ages as "a lost golden age of moral rectitude."²⁹¹

But the Pardoner's offensiveness goes even deeper than that. His

actions and his very demeanor are an affront to common belief, a shocking (but not, alas, atypical) deviation from pious ideals which were shared by high and low, learned and lewd. The structural significance of the Pardoner's self-exhibition within the project of Chaucer's fictional pilgrimage is crucial: for this character threatens to travesty, bring into ridicule, reduce to absurdity, every major spiritual reason for the expedition to Canterbury. If the real-life equivalents of Chaucer's pilgrims are anything to go by, there they expect to acquire authentic indulgences (as opposed to the possibly suspect ones which the Pardoner is offering), to offer to the authentic relics of St. Thomas à Becket (as opposed to the shoddy fakes which the Pardoner is carrying),²⁹² and to hear good sermons from godly men (a major improvement on the Pardoner's deficient *vita*, which threatens to undermine his fine *verba*).²⁹³ In sum, they would have engaged, no doubt with varying degrees of attention and devotion, in the religious practices of a world we have lost. Around Becket's shrine many *ex voto* offerings were on display, including wax images of parts of pilgrims' bodies which had been healed—a dramatic manifestation of the miraculous powers emanating from the saint's own body.²⁹⁴ "Truly he is dead but his hand and arm live on," as the *vita* written by the monk Benedict, Becket's contemporary, puts it, explaining that the saint's hand (symbolizing his power) continues to work and his arm takes vengeance.²⁹⁵ The gold-plated shrine itself was an object of wonder; it was further adorned with "a profusion of gems, including sapphires, diamonds, rubies and emeralds." Those are the words of a Venetian visitor of around 1500, who exclaimed that it "surpassed all belief." Everywhere the eye turns "something even more beautiful appears. The beauty of the materials is enhanced by the astonishing skill of human hands. Exquisite designs have been carved all over it and immense gems worked delicately into the patterns."²⁹⁶ Particularly striking was the wonderful jewel which King Louis VII of France was supposed to have bestowed upon Becket's shrine—"perhaps the most famous gift ever given to an English Cathedral."²⁹⁷ Dull was he of soul who was not awed by the spiritual mystery and potency of this sacred spot. For had not Christ Himself assured Becket of how the Church would be glorified in his blood? And this most blessed and powerful of English saints enjoyed the same honor as God had bestowed upon Sts. Peter and Paul (cf. p. 93 above); indeed, no other martyr's passion answered "so closely to the Lord's."²⁹⁸ Duly impressed, the pilgrims would have set off home with their indulgences, pilgrim badges representing the head reliquary of Becket, his shrine, or the sword that killed him (which could pull out of its tiny scabbard), "Canterbury bells" with the saint's name on them, and sundry good luck charms, such as the four-leaf clover with the initial "T" for "Thomas" in the

This was the genuine article, the gratifying and grace-conducive experience of faith. Anything offered by the likes of the Pardoner would inevitably look dubious by contrast. But, en route to Canterbury in Chaucer's narrative, this particular character sees his chance. Purchase pardon from me this very minute, he urges his fellow-travelers, or again and again during the journey, "Al newe and fressh at every miles ende." They are most fortunate, indeed honored, to have in their "felaweship" such a capable pardoner, who is ready and able to "assoile yow in contree as you ryde," thereby offering spiritual security lest anyone should have an accident and die en route (VI(C) 931–40). Indeed, the implication is, the pilgrims do not *have* to reach Canterbury to enjoy major spiritual benefits. That attentive reader of Chaucer's Pardoner, John Heywood, took this characterization a stage further, by having one of his own pardoner-figures ask, why go on pilgrimage at all when you can find an easy remedy "here at home" (96), "with smale cost and without any paine" (145), in the many indulgences he has on offer?

Nowe marke in this what wyt ye have
 To seke so farre and helpe so nye—
 Even here at home is remedy.
 For at your dore my selfe doth dwell,
 Who coulede have saved your soule as well
 As all your wyde wandrynge shall do
 Though ye wente thryes to Jericho.
 Nowe syns ye myght have spedde at home,
 What have ye wone by ronnyng at Rome? (*The Foure PP*, 94–102)

Here he is addressing a Palmer, who has undertaken an extraordinarily large number of pilgrimages, in England, Wales, Ireland—and even farther afield, including trips to Amiens, Armenia, Compostella, Jerusalem, Palermo, Paris, Rhodes, Rome, and Venice (9–50). The Palmer retorts that pardoners often enlarge "with . . . lyes" (112–13) the power of their indulgences; he himself is more confident about having received pardon by dint of the great "labour" expended on his travels. In similar vein, Chaucer's Pardoner enlarges with lies what a *quaestor* is actually able to do, offering his captive audience on the road to Canterbury many fine words and promises. His vainglory—that major defining sin of the immoral preacher—is unquenchable, and he becomes the very embodiment of the greedy pardoner who has exceeded his authorized duties by daring to preach in a way which goes far beyond the explanation and recommendation of his indulgences, and to offer priestly absolution.

Forgiveness for this degree of deviancy, this depth of travesty, would be hard to find. George Kittredge memorably identified the Pardoner as the greatest sinner among the group, "an abandoned

wretch” and “the one lost soul among the Canterbury Pilgrims.”³⁰⁰ And yet, almost in the next breath Kittredge found some signs of grace in him, at least when he admits that Jesus Christ’s “pardoun” is the best, “I wol yow nat deceyve” (VI(C) 916–18).³⁰¹ But that could merely be the timeless ploy of the skilled salesman who assures his clients that he is utterly sincere in urging them to buy some piece of merchandise, for offers like this are rare nowadays and he knows they’ll never regret it; he wouldn’t lie to them, etc. etc.³⁰² Besides, even if the Pardoner *had* some awareness of the spiritual risks he was running concerning the fate of his own immortal soul, his contemporary judges in the tribunal of penance would have been a lot less sentimental than Kittredge, far slower to forgive—if forgiveness was an option at all. For they were robust in their condemnation of the preacher who, even though his holy words could help others, failed to help himself.³⁰³ Generations of theologians cited God’s demand of the sinner, “Why dost thou announce my justice?” together with His terrifying response, “I will accuse you and stand against your face” (Psalm 49:16, 21). True, following the Pardoner’s downfall, he and the Host do kiss and make up—but the kiss of peace may be (and certainly is in this instance) a very superficial gesture, not indicative of any fellow-feeling or *frisson* whatever. The appearances are saved, the social decorum restored. But there is no reason to infer any sort of authorial absolution of the Pardoner for his many deviancies—deviancies which have little if anything to do with his sexual proclivities, whatever they may be.

Except, however, to the extent that licentiousness was often reckoned as one of the characterizing sins of the immoral preacher. That thought prompts one final speculation. The *Canterbury Tales* is of course an unfinished work, a text very much under construction, replete with tantalizing hints of what *might* have been and with fossils of former plans. The *Merchant’s Tale*, for instance, has (to state the obvious) been put in the mouth of a merchant: and yet, this narrator refers scathingly to people of secular estate, implying that the teller originally assigned by Chaucer was himself *not* of secular state (as of course any merchant would be) but rather a member of some religious order (cf. IV(E) 1251, 1322). Similarly, we may detect a discrepancy in Chaucer’s accounts of the Pardoner’s voice, as given in the General Prologue and the Pardoner’s Prologue, respectively (I(A) 688; VI(C) 330–31). In the former, he is described as having a “small” voice, like that of a goat (implying high pitch and tremulousness). Yet in the latter he is said to have an impressive preaching voice, which resounds like a bell.³⁰⁴ The ingenious attempts which have been made to reconcile these two statements fail to satisfy. We have to confront the fact of their discrepancy: and the best explanation seems the most

obvious one, namely that Chaucer was engaged in a process of rewriting which left some unfinished business, loose ends which, with world enough and time, he may well have tied up.³⁰⁵ Another instance of ongoing revision may be detected in the ways in which he presented the Pardoner's sexuality. In the *Pardoner's Prologue and Tale*, as argued above, a major model for the Pardoner was the standard portrait of the immoral and mercenary preacher, the cleric who failed to practice what he preached and (in the case in which his sin was public knowledge) scandalized his audience. One of the vices commonly attributed to this figure was (hetero)sexual immorality—and, predictably enough, the Pardoner claims he has a wench in every town, and seeks advice on women's love from the Wife of Bath. In the General Prologue, however, Chaucer may have moved some distance away from this model—a little or a lot, depending on the extent to which one believes that the later text is queering the earlier one. The Pardoner's sexuality is now presented in a more ambivalent manner: he might be a congenital “eunuch,” a man “capable of homosexual acts,” or a man whose desires found whatever outlet they could. On the other hand, Chaucer could simply be satirizing this hypocritical braggart through sexual insult based on his feminoid appearance; on this reading, the narrator is not particularly interested in the Pardoner's sexuality but simply mocks his looks to help satirize an abundance of crimes and misdemeanors which have little, if anything, to do with sex.

Whatever the truth of this matter, the (deeply problematic, I believe) search for the Pardoner's secret should not cause us to undervalue the complexity of Chaucer's presentation of religious idealism gone rotten, the tearing asunder of Christ's mystical body by greed for material things: money, food, drink, possessions, sex. . . . There was more than one type of “synne horrible” or “thyng abhominable”³⁰⁶ in the medieval register of vices. For the pardoner in Heywood's *Pardoner and the Frere*, the sin which God holds “most abhomynable” and “most dampnable” is “covetyse” (ll. 204–8), that of course being the sin which Chaucer's Pardoner both preached against and (extensively, undeniably) practiced.

. . . my theme is yet, and evere was,
Radix malorum est Cupiditas.
Thus kan I preche agayn that same vice
Which that I use, and that I avarice. (VI(C) 425–28)

Avarice was every bit as much a mortal sin as lechery, no matter what the physical object of a man's lusts. And public deviancy was more pressing, far more destructive, than private.

*De impedimento sexus*¹

Women's Bodies and the Prohibition of Priestly Power

Byhold opon Wat Brut · whou bisiliche þei pursueden
 For he seyde hem þe soþe · & ³et, syre, ferþere,
 Hy may no more marren [hym] · but men telleþ
 Þat he is an heretike · and yuele byleueþ,
 And prechiþ it in pulpit · to blenden þe puple;
 Þei wolden awyrien þat wi³t · for his well dedes;
 And so þei chewen charitie · as chewen schaf houndes. (657–63)²

Thus *Pierce the Ploughmans Crede* lauds Walter Brut, who has told the friars many home truths about how they have moved far away from Christ's "lore and his lawe." He seems to have been quite a celebrity among the religious dissenters of his day, since he is the only contemporary figure named in this Lollard poem apart from John Wyclif himself. But there is no mention therein of Brut's most radical ideas, which included the belief that "women have power and authority to preach and make the body of Christ, and they have the power of the keys of the church, of binding and loosing."³ Here I quote from the register of John Trefnant, Bishop of Hereford from 1389 until 1404, which records the trials of Brut and Brut's mentor William Swinderby. Trefnant recruited a large number of university men to refute those and other opinions as held by Brut; in addition to the extensive account in his register, a set of four *quaestiones* has survived, presumably the work of members of that team. Only one of these questions, which asks "Whether women are permitted to instruct men assembled in public," has thus far enjoyed full scholarly scrutiny.⁴ It draws extensively on material from the *Summa theologiae* of St. Thomas Aquinas and the *Summa quaestionum ordinariarum* of Henry of Ghent, works which had been written more than a century previously.

Those earlier discussions are part and parcel of a substantial body of scholastic material relating to the ordination of women and the priestly functions which they may (or more accurately, may not) perform, which has not yet received the attention it deserves. Hence the purpose of this chapter is to place the Walter Brut controversy in its wider intellectual context, by reviewing the earlier history of that tradition of theological discussion within which it should be placed. Thereby we will be well positioned to understand more fully the remarkable events in England during the 1390s, when Brut was tried for heresy and Chaucer was constructing his *Wife of Bath*, a female

fiction who embodies some of the worst fears of Brut's opponents.

During a period roughly spanning 1240 to 1337, a major *locus classicus* for discussion of the non-ordination of women was afforded by distinctions 24 and 25 of the fourth book of Peter Lombard's *Sentences*. This was the point at which the Lombard had discussed the sacrament of Holy Orders, and while he himself made no mention of the unsuitability of women as candidates for ordination, several of his commentators were interested in the issue.⁵ The following account makes use of the relevant discussions of eleven of them: in addition to those provided by Bonaventure,⁶ Thomas Aquinas,⁷ Peter of Tarantasia,⁸ John Duns Scotus,⁹ Durandus of St. Pourçain,¹⁰ and Peter of la Palud,¹¹ theologians who have been consulted above on other matters, I have drawn on the commentaries of Richard Fishacre O.P. (d. 1248),¹² Richard of Middleton O.F.M. (c. 1249–c. 1308),¹³ Francis of Meyronnes O.F.M. (before 1288–c. 1328),¹⁴ John of Bassoles, O.F.M. (d. 1347),¹⁵ and Thomas of Strasbourg O.E.S.A. (c. 1275–c. 1357).¹⁶ These materials have been supplemented with others, including relevant remarks found in the *summae* of Simon of Hinton and Gerard of Bologna together with Albert the Great's *Mariale super Missus est* and Humbert of Romans's *De eruditione praedicatorum*, and the remarkable *quaestio, Utrum mulier praedicando et docendo mereatur aureolam*, which was produced around 1263–66 by the Franciscan Eustace of Arras.¹⁷ Most important of all, however, are two *quaestiones* in the prologue to Henry of Ghent's *Summa, Utrum mulier possit esse doctor seu doctrix theologie* (art. 11, qu. 2) and *Utrum mulier possit esse auditor seu auditrix theologie* (art. 12, qu. 1).¹⁸ While Henry is not directly concerned with the issue of ordination here, his interests are akin to those of the commentators of Book IV, distinction XXV of the *Sentences*. In particular, his discussion of whether or not a woman can be a *doctor theologiae* is one of a sequence in which he has taken the usual impediments which were discussed in respect of ordination and reformulated them in terms of teaching to produce the questions: can a sinner be a doctor of theology? a boy? a woman? Finally, our discussion will include a few brief remarks from two works by Thomas of Chobham, which antedate all the other texts here listed.

In viewing these materials side by side it is crucial to realize that like is not being compared with like. Production of a commentary or lecture course on the Lombard's *Sentences* became, after Alexander of Hales (generally credited with having established the practice), a required task for students who were working toward their master's degree in theology. Such commentaries, however, survive in different forms. Several of the great theologians thoroughly revised their commentaries, providing fuller and more thoughtful versions of what they had said in lectures (late in the period these were sometimes

called *ordinationes*). Other commentaries, unfortunately, survive only in student's notes (the so-called *reportationes*). The *Sentences* commentary of Duns Scotus is a particularly interesting case in point. Duns managed to lecture on the Lombard in no less than three places, Cambridge (c. 1297–1300), Oxford (c. 1300–1302 and again in 1303–4), and Paris (c. 1302–3 and 1304). The first version of his work (which dates from his time in Cambridge and Oxford) and the second (produced in Paris) survive only in *reportationes*. The third and definitive version, his *ordinatio*, was never completed; hence we must be content with a *reportatio* of his questions on ordination, among many others.

Then again, there is the fact that not all of the *Sentences* commentators felt obliged to address the issue of the ordination of women. It is something of a puzzle—and perhaps explicable simply as a matter of personal choice and interest—as to why some theologians considered the matter while others did not; why (for example) Alexander of Hales and Albert the Great were silent on the issue while Albert's pupil Thomas Aquinas held forth on it, or why Richard Fishacre took it on while his distinguished successor in the Oxford Dominican house, Robert Kilwardby (d. 1279), ignored the opportunity. There are some real disappointments, particularly the absence of a relevant discussion in Albert the Great (in either his *Sentences* commentary or his later *Summa theologiae*), who has a lot of important, and quite distinctive, things to say about women's nature and bodies, most relevantly for our present purpose in his *Mariale super Missus est*. Moreover, while Thomas Aquinas produced a short but thoughtful discussion of female ordination in his *Sentences* commentary, we lack the mature formulation of his thinking on the issue, for he stopped working on his *Summa theologiae* tantalizingly close to the point at which the discussion of ordination was due to appear. What we have in the *Supplementum* to the *Summa* (qu. 39, art. 1) is, as per usual, simply a recycling of what St. Thomas had said in his *Sentences* commentary.

All these caveats having been entered, it may be said that, to judge by such evidence as is available to us, the broad outline of how the discussion developed seems clear enough. It is indubitable that commentators on the *Sentences* took over materials and methods of analysis from the text and gloss of that highly authoritative canon-law collection of the twelfth century, Gratian's *Decretum*. The treatments by Richard Fishacre and Simon of Hinton are very heavily dependent on the canonists. Then comes a period of theological elaboration of the issues involved, when the schoolmen brought to bear expertise of a kind not found in the *Decretum* commentaries, the most sophisticated treatments being, to my mind, those of Bonaventure, Henry of Ghent,

and Duns Scotus. What they had to say was never bettered—until, of course, the Lollard challenge focused the minds of members of the English clergy on the matter as never before. After the time of Duns, the terms of reference of the debate seem very fixed, with little of substance being added, and variation occurring mainly in terms of how the received ideas are organized and where the emphases are placed. In short, the debate seems to have run out of steam well before the exegesis of Books III and IV of the *Sentences* atrophied, as fourteenth-century commentaries concentrated on the first two books—or, more accurately, used the first two books as springboards for discussion of what they were really interested in, the Lombard’s text being left some distance behind.

I. SEX VERSUS SACRAMENT: THE CONSTRICTIONS OF SYMBOLISM

Some of the most telling arguments put forward by the theologians rested on the premise that ordination was a sacrament and hence (among other things) carried a specific and crucial symbolism which in its enactment and implementation demanded conformity of a most rigid kind. “A sacrament is the sign (*signum*) of a sacred thing (*res*),”¹⁹ explains Peter Lombard, “it brings by means of itself something else to our minds”—that is, the *res* behind the form.²⁰ Every sacrament is a sign but not every sign is a sacrament; crucially, “a sacrament bears a resemblance to the thing of which it is a sign.” If sacraments did not bear this resemblance, they would not properly be called sacraments.²¹ Thomas Aquinas explains further that the term “sacrament” denotes “that which is a sign of a sacred reality inasmuch as it has the property of sanctifying men.”²² Given that not every sign of a sacred reality is a sacrament, the term “sacrament” is reserved “solely for those things which signify the perfection of human sanctity.”²³ This is part and parcel of an elaborate semiotic system which God in his infinite wisdom and awareness of the weakness of human powers of reasoning has established. The divine wisdom provides for each thing according to its condition (*modus*); it is natural to man “to arrive at a knowledge of intelligible realities through sensible ones, and a sign is something through which a person arrives at knowledge of some further thing beyond itself.”²⁴ Aquinas goes on to offer a comparison with holy Scripture: in order that the Bible can “describe spiritual realities to us, corresponding sensible realities are used to illustrate them. And it is because of this that sensible realities are needed for the sacraments.”

This theory of sacramental symbolism encompasses the notion of

the special *character* or distinguishing mark which is bestowed by certain sacraments, namely those of baptism, confirmation, and ordination. As explained above (p. 67), the sacrament of ordination leaves a unique and crucially empowering imprint, marking off those who are in holy orders and indicating that they, and only they, have the authority to perform certain spiritual functions. “It is for him who institutes the signs to determine which particular sign is to be used” to represent the thing in question, explains Aquinas.²⁵ Who, then, instituted the sacred symbolism and the *character* associated with ordination? And how does this bear on the issue of female ordination?

The argument “from institution” (*ex institutione*) was one the most powerful weapons in the armory of the theologians who refuted the notion that women may receive holy orders. Richard of Middleton sums up the consensus view well when he says that the sacraments derive their power from their institution, and when Christ instituted the sacrament of ordination he conferred it on men alone, and not on women; hence the female sex is an impediment to ordination.²⁶ Having noted that the Church and the Apostles agree in excluding women, Duns Scotus goes on to emphasize that they, acting alone, would not have presumed to exclude a single person, let alone an entire sex, from a status so conducive to salvation.²⁷ It was their head, Christ Himself, who instructed them in this regard, He being the institutor of the sacrament. Durandus of Saint Pourçain, whose refutation of the idea of female ordination is heavily indebted to Duns’s account, reiterates this point succinctly in saying that the sacrament’s institution by Christ is its principal cause (*causa principalis*), and this institution laid down strict requirements for the sacrament’s administrators.²⁸

Later in his commentary Duns Scotus restates what is essentially the same point with the aid of the twelfth book of Aristotle’s *Metaphysics* and a commentary thereon.²⁹ Putting the argument in favor of female ordination (in order to refute it), Duns notes that, if within one and the same species there is an agent and passive recipients on which that agent acts, that agent will not produce a diversity of effect: that is to say, all passive recipients will receive the same effect, be acted upon in the same way.³⁰ Now, a bishop conferring the sacrament of ordination on a woman is an agent working in relation to a receiver from the same species. Both the bishop and the woman are members of the human race, and at the level of species sex is not a principle of distinction.³¹ On this argument, then, the effect of the bishop’s action is the same in a woman as in a man: if the bishop can ordain a man, he can also ordain a woman. In refuting this argument Duns draws on the distinction between a “principal agent” and an “instrumental agent.”

An instrumental agent acts only in accordance with the power of the principal and superior agent, as when a bishop acts in respect of God, who placed an impediment in the case of one recipient but not of another. Given that the rationale of this restriction depends on sex difference, it does *not* follow that the effect would be the same in a female recipient as in a male. In the hypothetical case in which a bishop attempted to confer holy orders on a woman, he would not be acting as the principal agent which confers the *character* of orders (because the principal agent is God), but only as a secondary and instrumental agent. As such his powers would be limited to those allowed him by the principal agent. Thus the bishop can confer orders only on that sex which has no impediment, that being the male of the human species.³²

In sum, if God decrees that women are not to be ordained—and orthodox late-medieval theologians were convinced that He had done precisely that—then as far as this sacrament is concerned the instrumental power possessed by a bishop relates exclusively to the masculine sex. Thus the nature of the institution of the sacrament is all-important and all-determining, in the minds of the schoolmen. He who institutes certain signs has the power of deciding, and fixing forever, which sign is to be used to represent a particular thing. Christ's choice of signs and determination of their significance is not to be gainsaid. Therefore women are denied priestly power.

But major issues remained. It was generally believed that the sacrament of ordination resided not in the body but in the soul. But gender is a thing of the body and not of the soul: *sexus non est in anima*. May it not be concluded, then, that whether the human body is male or female is irrelevant to holy orders; what matters is the soul, and women have souls just as men do. The orthodox rejections of that potentially subversive inference may now be considered.

Sexus non est in anima: Orthodox Positions

Only those who bear the image of God can possibly receive holy orders, Bonaventure declares, because in this sacrament a person becomes (as it were) God, and participates in the divine power.³³ I Corinthians 11:7 is cited in support of this proposition. There it is stated that the man should not cover his head “because he is the image and glory of God,” whereas “the woman is the glory of the man” (to be interpreted in the sense clarified by v. 9, where it is explained that the woman was created for the man rather than vice versa). This Pauline text recalls the passage in Genesis (1:27) where it is said that “God created man to his own image; to the image of God he created him.” And there was a canon law (*Mulier debet*) which declared—twisting the words of St. Paul somewhat—that a woman

should keep her head veiled because she does not present the image of God (*non est imago Dei*).³⁴ Bonaventure, however, does not mention that canon, and actually goes on to declare that woman bears God's image just as much as man. This is in the context of an argument in favor of female ordination, to the effect that holy orders relate to the soul and not to the body. Sex is a bodily matter, there being no sexual difference within the human soul; *ita imago Dei est mulier, ut vir*. Therefore, why should a woman not be entitled to receive holy orders, every bit as much as a man? Bonaventure will refute that particular argument,³⁵ but he—like Aquinas after him—is perfectly willing to concede that as far as her soul is concerned, a woman bears the *imago Dei* just as a man does. Addressing the fact that “After God's image he created him” is immediately followed by “male and female he created them” (Genesis 1:27) Aquinas explains that this was done *not* “to present the image of God in man in terms of sexual distinctions, but because the image of God is common to both sexes, being in the mind (*secundum mentem*) which has no distinction of sex.”³⁶ He proceeds to quote Galatians 3:28, which declares that in Christ there is neither male nor female.³⁷

But this does *not* impact on what St. Thomas and his contemporaries felt about the natural inferiority of woman. In discussing the creation of Eve, Aquinas argues that her subject-status predates the Fall: “this sort of subjection would have obtained even before sin. . . . Such is the subjection in which woman is by nature subordinate to man, because the power of rational discernment is by nature stronger in man.”³⁸ And by this means a major distinction creeps back in: the male and female of the species do not reflect the *imago Dei* in equal measure. Furthermore, in a “secondary sense” (*ad aliquid secundarium*) the image of God is found in man and not in woman, since, as St. Paul says, “man is the image and glory of God, but woman is the glory of man” (cf. once again I Corinthians 11:7). Adam was created first, marking the preeminence of man; woman came from man rather than vice versa. “Man is the beginning and end of woman, just as God is the beginning and end of all creation.”³⁹

Canon law tradition was even clearer on the matter. Joannes Teutonicus emphasizes that “man himself” is called the image of God, and Eve derived from Adam as an inferior: “as water flowed from the side of the Lord, so also Eve flowed from the side of man.”⁴⁰ Hostiensis believed that woman was not made in the image and likeness of God in the way that man was, and this is the basis of female inferiority; besides, women should abstain from taking over male responsibilities “out of female modesty.”⁴¹ Hugutio of Pisa comes up with three reasons why the man but not the woman is said to be made in God's image.⁴² First, in the beginning one man was created from whom all

others followed; to this extent man is God-like, because everything proceeded from the one God. Second, just as from the side of Christ on the cross the origin of the Church flowed, so from Adam's side emerged a rib from which his spouse was formed. Third, just as Christ is head of the Church so man is head of woman. For all these reasons, Hugutio concludes, woman partakes less of the dignity of the *imago Dei* than man does. The male form rightly signifies freedom and preeminence, while the female form signifies subjection. A "fourth way" is then conceded, however, by which both the man and the woman are said to present an image of God: the statement that God made man in His image and likeness (Genesis 1:26) may be understood as referring to the rational and intellectual nature of mankind in general, male and female being taken together. However, within the total economy of Hugutio's argument, this seems to be too little and too late, the weight of his first three reasons being decisive.

Little wonder, then, that belief in the image of God being "common to both sexes" did nothing to strengthen the case for female ordination. And Bonaventure's initially provocative deployment of the proposition that *sexus non est in anima* is left far behind as he affirms the sacramental nature of ordination, whereby Christ as mediator is signified. Since in Christ God took on male rather than female form, as mediator he can be signified only in the male sex and by the male sex.⁴³ Therefore the possibility of receiving holy orders relates to men alone, since only they can naturally represent Christ, and in accordance with the *character*⁴⁴ which they receive, function as an actual sign (*signum*) thereof. This is the "more probable" (*probabilior*) position, Bonaventure declares, and may be proved from many *auctoritates sanctorum*.

But what of the argument that sex is corporeal whereas orders are of the soul? The truth of the matter, Bonaventure argues, is that orders do not relate to the soul alone, but to the soul as it is joined (*conjuncta*) to the flesh. This is so on two counts. The first is because of signification (*ratio significationis*), the necessity of providing an appropriate visible sign. The second is because of the practical necessity of carrying out (*exsecutio*) those rites which ordination entails, in which bodily actions are essential. In this regard ordination is comparable with the other sacraments; as John Hilary Martin puts it, "Sacramental practice inevitably involved washings, meals, anointings and the like. Activities such as these could never be carried out by a 'soul' at an impersonal or disembodied level." A soul cannot, for instance, hold aloft a chalice, be clothed in holy vestments, make the vocal noises necessary for preaching. Priests need bodies. Holy orders need some visible sign which involves the body. The sacramental *character* "and the activity flowing from it could not

escape bodily identification.”⁴⁵ And therefore sexual difference matters after all. The human body must be either masculine or feminine,⁴⁶ and only the masculine body was perceived as capable of serving as an appropriate *signum* or of receiving the appropriate *character*.

Aquinas is similarly effective in neutralizing any subversive potential of the doctrine that “*sexus non est in anima*.”⁴⁷ His assertion that sexual difference is indeed of crucial importance in the denial of holy orders builds on a distinction between the types of quality that are necessary for the reception of a sacrament. Some qualities are so necessary that without them neither the sacrament itself nor the reality of which it is a sacrament is received. Others concern certain precepts relating to what is appropriate to the sacrament, these being significant inasmuch as their absence will hinder not its reception but rather the reality which it promises, i.e., that state of grace which the sacrament brings. The *sexus virilis* is necessary for ordination not only in the second sense but also in the first, declares Aquinas, because since a sacrament is a sign (*signum*) the symbolism must support what is being symbolized. In other words, the recipient, to borrow yet another phrase from Martin, “must be able to be seen as a living sign, a living symbol, of what the sacrament claims to be offering.”⁴⁸ Aquinas offers a comparison with the sacrament of Extreme Unction. Here the ill are anointed, thus symbolizing their spiritual healing. But if someone who was not ill received this sacrament, then he would not be a proper symbol of this process. Similarly, since on account of her subject-position (*status subjectionis*) a woman cannot signify that high status (*eminentiae gradus*) which is associated with the ordained, she cannot receive the sacrament of ordination.

Turning specifically to the “sex is not in the soul” argument, Aquinas emphasizes that this is indeed true, and therefore a woman may be found who, as far as the state of her soul is concerned, is better than many men. This explains why the gift of prophecy and many other spiritual gifts can be received by women—but not ordination, which (unlike prophecy) is a sacrament, and requires *significatio* as well as *res*. A version of this same argument is found in Thomas of Strasbourg’s *Sentences* commentary.⁴⁹ Thomas plays an interesting variation on the theme by emphasizing that, in respect of those things which aim toward the meriting of eternal life, there is not a distinction as far as the soul is concerned. Every human being, whether male or female, will be rewarded in the afterlife to the extent that he or she loves God and conducts himself or herself virtuously in this world. However, he continues, there is a distinction as far as the soul is concerned in respect of holy orders, especially if the office in question is one in the exercise of which the soul is accompanied by

the body as mediator. And this is the case with the various offices relating to holy orders; priests must use their bodies to carry out their holy work. Therefore, although ordination is a spiritual power, on account of those things which are related to its offices that power is not communicable to and by women. In short, mediation (in Thomas's terms) requires a body, and women have the wrong type of body.

The notion of the *eminentiae gradus* requires some clarification, however, since neither Bonaventure nor Aquinas go into it in detail in the discussions which have been summarized above. Bonaventure's thinking may be elaborated with reference to a passage from earlier in his *Sentences* commentary where he asks if it would have been appropriate for Christ to have assumed flesh in female form.⁵⁰ His answer is in the negative, since "without any doubt" Christ had to take on the male form on account of its greater dignity ("muliebris sexus non est tantae dignitatis, sicut virilis"). In his *Summa theologiae* Aquinas makes exactly the same point: the male sex is more noble (*nobilior*) than the female, and it was appropriate that Christ should assume what is perfect in human nature.⁵¹ In the very next sentence this statement is qualified somewhat with the remark, "So that people should not think little of the female sex, it was fitting that he should take flesh from a woman." But the essential point (as far as we are concerned) is abundantly clear. Because of the inferior, subject-status of the female sex, a woman's body cannot appropriately image God, no matter how noble her soul may be.

This is emphasized by Duns Scotus.⁵² *Ordo*, he explains, is a particular *gradus eminentiae* over other people in the Church, which should be signified by an appropriate condition and grade of eminence in nature.⁵³ Women are in a state of natural subjection to men; therefore they cannot possess any grade of eminence over men, because in nature as in condition and nobility all women (i.e., the sex considered in general) are less noble than any man.⁵⁴ Whence after the Fall God subjected them in dominion and power to men.⁵⁵ Anyone who receives an *ordo* in the church must be able to preside and have dominion over others, but this is contrary to the condition of women. Therefore a bishop who conferred orders on a woman would not only behave badly (in acting contrary to the precept of Christ) but would in fact achieve nothing, and the woman would receive nothing, because she is not material (*materia*) capable of receiving this sacrament, for in instituting this sacrament Christ confined it to certain individuals within the human species and to the male sex.

But what, then, of St. Paul's statement (in Galatians 3:28) that in Jesus Christ there is neither male nor female, neither bond nor free? Here is an *auctoritas* which seems to put the *sexus non est in anima* argument in a way that has major implications for the issue of female

ordination. Duns Scotus quotes it at the very beginning of his *quaestio*.⁵⁶ It would seem from this passage, he says, that neither sex nor condition (*conditio*) impedes ordination. And in the same place it is said that Christ principally ordains (apparently a reference to v. 29, “And if you be Christ’s, then are you the seed of Abraham, heirs according to the promise”). Duns’s reply is that, although as far as salvation and eternal life are concerned there is no difference between male and female, bond and free, yet nevertheless there is a difference as far as office is concerned and the possession of a grade of eminence in the Church, because in this respect the male is set before the female.⁵⁷ Similarly, Richard of Middleton argues that, while in terms of merit there may well be no difference between male and female, in respect of office (*officium*) there is indeed a difference.⁵⁸ A definite *gradus eminentiae* is presupposed by ordination, which should be signified by the natural eminence of the ordained person. But woman is in a state of subjection to the male sex, that being a situation which is consonant with nature. And this is an impediment to the ordination of women.

It is apparent, then, that woman’s alleged natural inferiority, as well as the nature of her body, serves to bar her from ordination on the grounds that along with the *res* this sacrament requires an appropriate *significatio*. The female sex cannot bear the sacred *character*, that distinctive stamp which holy orders brings, and therefore in terms of *ordo* the female body cannot function as a valid *signum* of a higher truth.

Crowning Glories

The conviction that only the male sex can effectively symbolize those spiritual realities relating to ordination sometimes manifests itself in imagery which may obscure, and perhaps even subvert, the supernatural issues involved. An instance of this occurs when Bonaventure blurs together natural sex and symbolic sex, in arguing that a woman cannot marry the Church because the Church is female. To be specific, what he actually says is that by dint of his office the bishop is the bridegroom of the Church.⁵⁹ Only a man can be a bishop, otherwise he could not be called a bridegroom of the Church. (On this argument, if a woman were a bishop we would have a case of same-sex marriage—for both she and the Church would be brides.) And, since all the lesser holy orders are a preparation for the episcopate, and lead up to it, therefore only men can hold them.

Even more complicated configurations of nature and grace, of *significatio* and *res*, occur when the *Sentences* commentators focus on the issue of the clerical tonsure, explaining that very different kinds of crowning glory are appropriate to men and women. The origins of the

practice of shaving or cutting the hair in a particular fashion as a sign of reception into certain orders are obscure. Doubtless one of the influential factors was the belief of certain Church Fathers that long hair in men was effeminate or worse. Jerome, for instance, inveighed against long-haired monks: “avoid men . . . when you see them . . . wearing their hair long like women, contrary to the Apostle’s precept [i.e., I Corinthians 11:14], not to speak of beards like those of goats. . . . All these things are tokens of the devil.”⁶⁰ And immediately before this he had attacked hypocritical religious women, who dress like men, “being ashamed of what they were born to be—women. They cut off their hair and are not ashamed to look like eunuchs.”⁶¹ (Here, once again, we encounter the belief that an appropriate amount of hair is a mark of manliness, as discussed previously in our chapter on Chaucer’s Pardoner.) But whatever the specific sources and motivations behind the practice, it was (of course) firmly established in the period with which we are here concerned, and it had developed an elaborate symbolism. In his *Sentences* commentary Thomas Aquinas notes that a crown is a symbol of royalty and its circular form a sign of perfection.⁶² Those who are initiated into the divine mysteries acquire a royal dignity and should be perfect in virtue; therefore their tonsures constitute outward and visible natural signs of spiritual realities.

The Scriptural text which lies behind Jerome’s attack on shorn women and excessively hairy men, I Corinthians 11, features in some of the *Sentences* commentators’ discussions of the ordination of women. For example, Richard of Middleton quotes the Apostle as saying that it is “a shame to a woman to be shorn or made bald” (v. 6), and a little later (v. 15) adding, “if a woman nourish her hair, it is a glory to her.”⁶³ From these passages Richard concludes that women cannot be ordained or become clerics: no tonsure, no *ordo*. In similar vein, Duns Scotus picks up on the contrast between women who have their hair as their crowning glory and priests who are prevented from nourishing (i.e., allowing to grow) their hair: “Doth not even nature itself teach you that a man indeed, if he nourish his hair, it is a shame unto him?” (v. 14). Duns interprets this as meaning that priests must be tonsured. Since only men may be tonsured, it follows that priests must be men.⁶⁴

Bonaventure’s discussion of this issue, which is the fullest known to me, exploits the discourse of natural capability with which we have already become familiar.⁶⁵ By no means can an *ordo* be conferred on that which does not have the natural potential or aptitude to receive it. No one has the potential to be ordained who does not have the aptitude to receive the clerical tonsure and crown. And no one who should always appear in Church with a veiled head has such a natural

apitude. Therefore women, who must have their heads veiled while at prayer in Church, as St. Paul says (I Corinthians 11:5), are barred from ordination because they lack this natural capacity.

In marked contrast to all these accounts stands the unusual *quaestio* of Eustace of Arras, wherein the crowning glory at issue is the golden crown (*aureola*) or heavenly reward reserved for those who preach and teach the word of God.⁶⁶ Eustace allows the results achieved by certain holy women to speak for themselves: Saints Mary Magdalene and Catherine of Alexandria did indeed preach, thereby converting an abundance of important people to faith in Christ.⁶⁷ Their great success is a clear sign that they were specially selected as evangelists by the Holy Spirit, so it may piously be believed that God awarded them the *aureola* which appertains to preachers. However, such speculation is absent from the *Sentences* commentaries under discussion, where the materiality of the symbolism relating to the priestly tonsure serves to justify the subordination of the entire female sex. Only Thomas Aquinas (among the discussants known to me) strikes a note of caution in noting that the tonsure is not a necessity for ordination as far as the sacrament itself is concerned (*de necessitate sacramenti*).⁶⁸ But it is evident that he believes on other grounds that those who are ordained should be tonsured. Thus he stands shoulder-to-shoulder with all the other *Sentences* commentators who thought fit to raise the issue. In sum, symbolism relating to the male body is functioning as at once an agency and expression of power, in valorizing certain aspects of physical appearance which women cannot—or are not allowed to—emulate.

A Woman's Touch

This conclusion is afforded further support by arguments which raise the specter of the unclean female body. Fishacre is the first *Sentences* commentator who is known to have presented the view that women cannot perform priestly functions because they are not permitted to touch sacred vessels or garments.⁶⁹ Here he is drawing on Gratian's *Decretum*; specifically, the canon *Sacratas*, falsely attributed to Pope Soter (who reigned from 166 to 174).⁷⁰ This explains that it has come to the papacy's attention that "women dedicated to God, or nuns, touch the sacred vessels or altar cloths and carry incense around the altar," which practices must cease forthwith. The implications of this canon for female ordination were emphasized by Fishacre's successors. Bonaventure cites it at the very beginning of his refutation of the idea of female ordination.⁷¹ If women are not permitted to handle or touch holy things, affirms Duns Scotus, how much more are they not permitted to be ordained?⁷² If their sex impedes the first, so also the second. And Richard of Middleton states that whatever hinders

contact with the sacraments hinders the reception of holy orders; therefore the female sex hinders the reception of holy orders.⁷³ Versions of this argument, prompted by *Sacratas*, are also found in the *Summa* of Simon of Hinton and the *Sentences* commentary of Peter of Tarantasia.⁷⁴

Thomas of Chobham goes further than anyone else in my selected corpus of texts, in declaring that women may not wear sacred vestments or read the Epistle or the Gospel at Mass, on account of the uncleanness of their menses (“which often befalls them”) or because their presence would inflame priests and other clerics with lustful desires for them.⁷⁵ Here the natural bodily functions of women are taken as an indication of their lack of spiritual purity, while the (apparently inevitable!) sexual attractions which those same bodies are supposed to exude serve to exclude them from participation in ecclesiastical rites and rituals that involve men.

In sum, the female body is deemed incapable of receiving the necessary *character* or bearing the weight of sacred symbolism relating to the priesthood; furthermore, its polluted and polluting nature bars its owner from official administration of the sacraments. In these crucial respects, human sexuality and the holy sacrament seem inevitably to be at odds.

II. SILENCE IN CHURCH: PRIVATE TEACHING AND THE DENIAL OF PUBLIC OFFICE

Confining the *auditrix* and *doctrix*

To make matters even worse, those weak but physically alluring bodies were believed to be animated by weak minds. But women had to be taught those things that are necessary for their salvation. Does this not mean that a woman must be a “studentess” (*auditrix*) of the superlative science of theology—a quite shocking suggestion, given the exclusion of women from higher education? Addressing this question, Henry of Ghent puts forward the proposition that a woman should indeed receive such instruction, and she cannot learn unless by being a student.⁷⁶ Besides, nothing which is imperfect should be hindered from the pursuit of its perfection. Women are imperfect in the sciences and virtues, just as men are, and therefore they should be instructed in this science just like men. On the other hand, women cannot hear public lectures on the subject (i.e., attend the lectures held in theological schools), in accordance with yet another of St. Paul’s injunctions concerning women: “if they would learn anything, let them ask their husbands at home” (I Corinthians 14:35). Since this science is conveyed by public lecture, whoever cannot learn through

this medium of instruction cannot learn the science, which would seem to exclude women.

Henry offers the following solution. There are certain aspects of the science of theology, relating to both life and behavior, which are necessary for men and women alike to know. In this sense, then, it is necessary for women to “audit” the science. Drawing on Augustine, Henry proceeds to identify two ways in which we can be instructed in faith and behavior.⁷⁷ First, we may be taught what to believe and what to do in order to achieve eternal life. Second, we may gain knowledge whereby we can help the pious and oppose the impious. Being an *auditor* of the science in the second sense entails being thoroughly instructed in its depths, equipped to persuade others publicly about those truths and to defend them against adversaries. In those terms, a woman cannot learn theology, for women cannot teach publicly, as Henry argues elsewhere.⁷⁸ Indeed, on account of the weakness of woman’s natural capacity (*ingenium*) it is not possible for her to attain a high degree of perfection in this science. Assuredly, if she expends herself in searching out its hidden mysteries a woman is more likely to fall into error rather than make headway. Few people are successful in this difficult science—and women are not among their number. Turning to the first sense (i.e., learning what must be believed and how to act accordingly), Henry introduces a further distinction. One can be taught things which are necessary for one’s station in life or things which are not suitable to it. In the latter sense, a woman cannot be a pupil of this science inasmuch as she should not know things which are inappropriate to her status. A discreet teacher should propound to the woman only what it is her business to know, and not go beyond that—even if she wishes to do so, for women are curious to know things which they do not need to know. And therefore, Henry protests, those people act very foolishly who instruct women in theology beyond what is decent and necessary—especially those who disclose the secrets of Scripture and translate them into the vernacular (*in vulgari sermone*) so that women may read them. Little wonder that Henry was such a favorite with those later bastions of orthodoxy, the conservative theologians who sought to refute the errors of Walter Brut and his fellow-Lollards. Henry sums up this phase of his argument by declaring that to “hear” this science in the sense of learning those things which are necessary for salvation and relevant to one’s station in life is perfectly allowable to women. Indeed, such teaching is highly useful to them in their lives, and a similar argument can be made in respect of every man, including laymen.

This is an application and development of the distinction between basic knowledge (for humanity in general) and specialized knowledge

(for an élite of mature males) which runs through Henry's entire article on the auditor of theology.⁷⁹ He proceeds to offer another variation on the same theme by deploying the distinction between teaching and preaching. There are two ways in which theology may be heard: by hearing a lecture wherein the sequence of sacred Scripture is expounded, or by hearing preaching, whereby only what is expedient is made known from Scripture. It is not possible for a woman to be an auditor of lectures on theology on two grounds: because in a lecture difficult and secret things are expounded from Scripture which are not appropriate for a woman to hear, and because it is not permitted for a woman to be taught in public, in accordance with 1 Timothy 2:11 ("Let the woman learn in silence"). By contrast, in preaching, whether public or private, a woman may hear this science, because in preaching deep matters are not propounded, but rather those things which are appropriate for the general run of humanity. If women wish to learn anything further they should not question publicly the preacher but ask their menfolk in the privacy of their own homes, as the full passage from 1 Corinthians 14 which was partly quoted above makes clear: "Let women keep silence in the churches . . . if they would learn anything, let them ask their husbands at home" (vv. 34–35). Thus Henry returns to the text which had proved so invaluable in his rejection of the notion that a woman should teach theology, even repeating the *Glossa ordinaria's* explanation of v. 35 ("For it is a shame for a woman to speak in church") that this is against the law of the church.

The replies which should be made to the initial arguments are therefore obvious, Henry concludes. It is quite permissible for a woman to be an auditor of the science of theology in order to hear what she needs to know for her salvation, but not to hear matters which fall outside that limiting category. And she should learn not by public lecture but by preaching. Furthermore, while it is true that woman is imperfect (just as man is) with regard to the science of theology, and therefore should seek to improve herself, it does not follow that she should do this just like a man should. It is not permissible for a woman to study toward perfecting herself in theological knowledge in this life, except inasmuch as is sufficient to ensure that she will pass into eternal glory, where all that is imperfect will be perfected.

Gerard of Bologna, whose *summa* in this regard—as in so many others— is dependent on Henry's, hammers home the distinction between what is heard "in scolis" and what is heard "in publica predicacione," limiting the education of women to the latter sphere. Moreover, when Gerard states that the instruction of women should be confined to those "broad (*grossa*), not subtle and difficult things"

which are provided “vulgari predicacione,” his language expresses a professional’s detachment from the “vulgar” common herd as well as designating the “vernacular” language which preachers used in addressing the populace at large.⁸⁰

Women, then, cannot be “students” (*auditores, auditrices*) of theology in the academic sense of the term. Likewise, they cannot be professional preachers or teachers of theology. Humbert of Romans makes this abundantly clear in his *Liber de eruditione praedicatorum*.⁸¹ The preacher must be of male sex for four reasons. The first concerns understanding (*sensus*): “a man is more likely to have understanding than a woman.” Second, the preacher occupies a superior position, whereas women are of inferior status (*conditio subjectionis*). Third, if a woman were to preach, “her appearance would inspire lustful thoughts (*provocaret ad luxuriam*),” as the *Glossa ordinaria* says concerning I Timothy 2:12, “I do not permit a woman to teach.”⁸² Fourth, “as a reminder of the foolishness of the first woman,” of whom Bernard says, “She taught once and wrecked the whole world.”⁸³ A fuller treatment is provided by Henry of Ghent—whose question *Utrum mulier possit esse doctor seu doctrix huius scientiae* is, indeed, the most comprehensive of its kind. In order for someone to teach *ex officio*, Henry of Ghent argues, four things are required: constancy of teaching, effectiveness of performance, authority, and strength and vigor of speech.⁸⁴ Women can neither be constant in teaching nor effective in its communication because they are the weaker sex. Woman’s inconstancy is proved by her role in the fall of mankind. Moreover, women are unable to make the necessary physical effort; because of the fragility of their sex, they simply lack the strength to speak at length and labor in public. As far as authority is concerned, a woman cannot have this because of her inferior subject-status (as attested by Genesis 3:16). Concerning vigor and liveliness of speech, the speech of women does not lead to mortification but rather provokes sin, which is why the *Glossa ordinaria* on Paul’s prohibition of women preachers at I Timothy 2:12 says that a female teacher would greatly incite the males in her audience to lust—kindle it like a fire, to adopt the idiom of Ecclesiasticus 9:9.⁸⁵ In sum, because of her deficiency in each of these four crucial areas, a woman cannot hold the office of *doctor seu doctrix* of theology. All four of Henry’s requisites for preaching *ex officio* were to be reiterated in the anti-Brut *quaestio*, “Whether women are permitted to instruct men assembled in public.”⁸⁶

Henry is, as already noted, not concerned here with the issue of female ordination as such. But the question of whether a woman could or should preach was intimately connected with that issue, as is made abundantly clear by, for example, Duns Scotus’s account of female

frailties. He identifies the main sphere of competence which priests possess as preaching.⁸⁷ It is perfectly obvious, then, that if women cannot preach *de facto* or *de iure* then they cannot be priests. Duns proceeds to disqualify them from preaching on both these counts, in terms similar to those used by Henry of Ghent.⁸⁸ St. Paul's prohibition of women from preaching (I Timothy 2:12), is cited, which Duns explains as being on account of weakness of intellect and emotional instability, drawbacks which women generally suffer from more than men. However, the teacher (*doctor*) should have a lively intellect in the understanding of truth and stability of emotions in confirming it. Similarly, Richard of Middleton argues that holy orders involve the function (*officium*) of teaching inasmuch as they are related to the priesthood (priesthood being the principal office, while that of the deacon is a delegated one).⁸⁹ Now, preaching is evangelical teaching; the clear implication is that it requires the best presentation and transmission possible. It is not appropriate, Richard declares, for those who have weak intellects and changeable emotions to teach publicly. There is general agreement (it is held *de communi lege*) that women are more notably deficient in these areas than men are. The teacher (*doctor*) should have a lively intellect for understanding the truth, and stable emotions so that he may persist in his promise of fidelity. The obvious conclusion is that women cannot be teachers of theology. In respect of the *officium docendi*, says Durandus, boys and women are not suitable as teachers, boys on account of their deficiency of reason and women on account of the Apostle's interdict.⁹⁰

Durandus (like Aquinas, Duns Scotus, Francis of Meyronnes, John of Bassoles, and Gerard of Bologna) considers together the impediments to ordination presented by a boy's age and a woman's sex.⁹¹ In other *Sentences* commentaries the age issue is treated as a separate issue, as is also true of Henry of Ghent's *Summa*. But these two problems are clearly related, and the contrast in the solutions offered is highly revealing. Boys are able to leave their deficiencies behind; with age and maturity their reasoning powers increase and their emotional instabilities decrease (and of course their sex ensures that they have the potential to receive the special *character* of ordination and image the divine in the way that Christ wanted). Women, on the other hand, never grow out of their frailties. Trapped in bodies at once weak, impure, and highly provocative sexually, hindered by weak minds and unstable emotions, and designed to live in subjection to men (even if the Fall had never occurred, to follow Aquinas),⁹² they make highly unlikely candidates for ordination. Their sex presents impediments which may never be removed, in this life at least. Nothing can deliver women from their bodies of death.⁹³

But were there not major precedents in canon law which could be

used to make the case for female ordination? For instance, in the *Decretum* the canon *Diaconissam* states that a deaconess should not be ordained before the age of forty.⁹⁴ And the canon *Presbyter* speaks of how, from the time when he was put in charge of a church, a certain *presbyter* loved his *presbytera* as a sister but treated her as he would an enemy in that he did not allow her to come near him.⁹⁵ Taken together these passages seem to indicate that female deacons and presbyters once existed and therefore can exist in the present.

The first of these canons, *Diaconissam*, was a product of the Council of Chalcedon (451). It held no fears for the *Sentences* commentators. Fishacre, Bonaventure, Aquinas, Peter of Tarantasia, Richard of Middleton, Duns Scotus, Durandus, Peter of la Palud, Francis of Meyronnes, and Thomas of Strasbourg unite in the view that it refers to women (sometimes specifically identified as nuns) who are given, as a special privilege, the task of reading the homily at Matins. Richard of Middleton and Duns Scotus include a reference to a *Decretum* gloss in which it is explained that *diaconissa* means “Abbess.” But such women cannot take part in the ministry of the Mass, Peter of Tarantasia and Peter of la Palud emphasize, or recite the Gospel. In short, the term means simply that they participate in one act, and one alone, which is proper to a deacon (as Aquinas succinctly puts it). Hence they are very far away from being ordained priests.

The second canon, *Presbyter*, derives from pseudo-Gregory the Great’s *Dialogues*.⁹⁶ Pseudo-Gregory’s anecdote is worth recounting in more detail. It tells of how, after his elevation, the *presbyter* in question avoided not only carnal relations with his wife (for such was her status) but all forms of contact, not even allowing her to render him the necessary domestic services. One day, when he was ill and on the point of death, this woman put her ear to his face, trying to hear if he was still breathing. Aware of her presence, he summoned all his strength and shouted, “Go away from me, woman. The fire is still flickering. Take away the tinder.” As she stepped back, his strength seemed to return to him, and he exclaimed that he could see the Apostles in front of him. Saying “I come, I come,” he breathed his last. Even on the point of death, it would seem, the (apparently inevitable) sexual lures of a woman’s body can threaten a holy man’s sanctity; the tinder is still capable of bursting into flame, even in these quite improbable circumstances.

Neither the *Decretum* nor the *Sentences* commentaries listed above go into such detail, but there was never any chance that the canon *Presbyter* could seriously challenge the status quo, particularly in view of the fact that Gratian himself had provided an explanation which rendered it null and void as a precedent for female ordination. The term *presbytera* actually referred to a widow or some senior woman,

he declares, and then presents a canon from the Council of Laodicea which says that women who in the Greek church were called *presbyterae* are nowadays (“apud nos”) called widows, senior *univirae* (i.e., women who have had only one husband) or “churchmothers” (*matricuriae*), but they cannot be ordained.⁹⁷ Versions of this argument are found in Bonaventure, Aquinas, Richard of Middleton, Durandus, and Peter of la Palud. Others echo it but add the view that in the ancient church the word designated the *wife* of a presbyter. Hence Richard Fishacre glosses it as “uxor presbyteri vel etiam vidua matricuria,” explaining the latter in terms of a *materfamilias* of the Church. Duns Scotus speaks of *uxores presbyterorum*,⁹⁸ Peter of Tarantasia of *coniugata sacerdoti*, and Peter of la Palud of *uxor sacerdotis*, while Thomas of Strasbourg states that in the Greek kingdom (“in regnos Graecorum”) a *presbytera* was the wife of a presbyter, while in the Roman church the term means an abbess or some other honest matron who shows others the right path by good behavior and example.

Limiting Biblical Precedent

What, then, of those holy women who feature in the book with the greatest authority of all, the Bible? Fishacre, Duns Scotus, Durandus, John of Bassoles, and Thomas of Strasbourg all cite the case of the Virgin Mary, who was of the greatest dignity and sanctity, and yet Christ did not confer holy orders upon her. Without a doubt, enthuses Thomas of Strasbourg, Christ’s own mother was the most noble and most holy of creatures. But He did not ordain her, which proves that no woman is capable of receiving this particular sacrament. For Christ, as a good son, honored his mother over all other creatures; consequently, if according to the divine plan any woman was capable of receiving this sacrament, Christ would certainly not have denied Mary this level of eminence.

These accounts of the role and status of the Blessed Virgin are quite perfunctory; for a fuller discussion we must turn away from the *Sentences* commentaries to the relevant *quaestiones* in Albert the Great’s *Mariale super Missus est* (c. 1245). Despite its title, his *quaestio* “why are women not promoted to sacred orders?” does not discuss the matter in general but rather explores why the Virgin Mary in particular did not receive this honor.⁹⁹ The exclusion of women other than the Blessed Virgin from the priesthood is assumed rather than asserted. For example, Albert remarks that, if one argues that women cannot be ordained because of the guilt transmitted through Eve, that is certainly not a problem in Mary’s case, given that she was free of such guilt.¹⁰⁰ True, Albert does pose the demanding question, since the Lord nowhere seems to prohibit women from the sacrament of Holy

Orders, why has Holy Church dared to invent this by herself? But what he proceeds to say about Mary has little if any import for the status or situation of any other woman.

She occupies a status and position that lifts her far above the business of the Church Militant. The highest in rank in the Church is the pope, who is the vicar of Jesus Christ, but the blessed Virgin, far from being a mere vicar, is Christ's "helper and ally" (*coadjutrix et socia*), and "partner" (*particeps*) in His kingdom, just as she was a partner in His sufferings for the human race. Indeed, when all the disciples and ministers were fleeing, she stood steadfast by the cross, receiving in her heart the wounds which Christ bore on his body. As question 41 puts it, she is "the spiritual mother of all the faithful," "subordinate to no human power," and possesses the "highest dignity" in the Church. Why, then, should her perfection not comprise that grace which is conferred by the sacrament of orders?¹⁰¹

The simple answer is that it is because of her very eminence that she was not ordained. For, while the sacrament of orders confers a certain external dignity, in terms of outward reputation, inwardly "it pertains to servitude."¹⁰² "All the honours of the Church have been introduced for service and ministering (*in servitium et ministerium*)," which is why those who labor to save souls are called "shepherds"—and this is beneath the Virgin's dignity, since before God she had "the highest dignity inwardly," while "outwardly before people she had the greatest humility." (And therein lies another reason why she was not ordained: "because of her humble conformity to other women, who are excluded from this sacrament" of Holy Orders "on account of the unworthiness of their sex, of their greater weakness regarding sin, and due to what follows from these factors—the incongruity of their holding office.")

Furthermore, the fact that she was not ordained did not mean that she lost out in some way, in terms of dignity or grace. A review of the various orders follows, from exorcist to pope, wherein Albert describes the manner in which Mary possessed all their characteristic dignities and graces "equivalently and with excellence (*per æquipollentiam et cum excellentia*).” For example, with bishops she shares "the power to ordain clerics, to confer ecclesiastical positions, to consecrate churches, and receive sacred virgins into religious congregations"—on the face of it, a quite startling statement, but Albert is talking in terms of equivalences rather than literally and historically. A bishop ordains priests through the conferring of the sacrament of holy orders, while the Blessed Virgin cleanses her followers by imposing on them the obligation of continence. A bishop "consecrates churches by dedicating corporeal holy places," while the Blessed Virgin "consecrates spiritual temples by inspiring chastity, and by vindicating

it especially in herself.” And so forth. Hence, the comprehensive conclusion may be reached that “the blessed Virgin lacked nothing in whatsoever there is of dignity or grace in the sacraments of the Church,” including the sacrament of order, “through the plenitude of grace that was in her. She possessed all of this fully, either in the sacramental graces themselves, or in graces that were equivalent to them or excelled them (*in earum æquipollentibus, vel excellentibus*).” Here, then, is no precedent for “other women, who are excluded” from the sacrament of Holy Orders, for whom holding office would be quite incongruous, due to the impediments presented by their sex.

So much, then, for the celebration and careful authorization of the Blessed Virgin, unique among and over all women. What of those holy women who, while certainly not on a par with the Virgin Mary, were quite exceptional nevertheless? The cases of Anna (Luke 2:36) and Deborah (Judges 4) are considered regularly within our sequence of *Sentences* commentaries. The former is taken as an example of the prophetess; the latter, of the woman who had the power of judgment over men. With reference to Anna, the question is raised: surely if women can prophesy they can also be ordained? By the gift of prophecy one is not given power over another, as is the case with the gift of holy orders, answers Peter of Tarantasia. Richard of Middleton makes a fuller response. The fact that a woman like Anna prophesied does not mean that women can be ordained, for we are not dealing with like things. By her ability to prophesy the woman is not given power of the appropriate kind over the man—in contrast with the man who is ordained, who enjoys a degree of eminence higher than that of men who are not ordained. Similarly, there is nothing repugnant in a woman being an abbess over other women, on account of the perils which would exist if women cohabited with a male superior. But it would be discordant if she were to be an abbess over men.

Thomas Aquinas takes Huldah (cf. IV Kings 22:14) rather than Anna as his test case of a prophetess, and his solution is the same although his argument line is somewhat different. The *officium prophetiae* is surely greater than the *officium sacerdotis*, and since the former is granted to women, why not the latter? Prophecy, he replies, is not a sacrament but a gift of God, and therefore it may be given to women as much as men, since *secundum rem* as far as the affairs of the soul are concerned men and women do not differ. But women’s bodies cannot bear that sacramental symbolism which the priesthood requires.

Deborah is mentioned by Bonaventure, Aquinas, and Thomas of Strasbourg.¹⁰³ If the female sex was antithetical to holy orders, postulates Thomas of Strasbourg, this would appear most obviously in respect of the most important aspect of the activities which are

involved, which would mean that women could not be capable of possessing the power of judgment (*potestas iudicandi*). But it would seem that this is not an obstacle, for as is clear from Judges 4:5, Deborah judged the people of Israel, and had done so for many years. Thomas tackles the problem with a crucial distinction. The power of judgment is twofold (*duplex*); one is in temporal things, the other in spiritual matters. In the first case there is nothing to impede women, because many women have great temporal power, and such women exist in different parts of the world. And this was the type of power which Deborah had. But the power of spiritual judgment is not appropriate to women, and consequently neither are holy orders, the power of which is purely spiritual. Bonaventure says very much the same thing, though he adds the refinement that in the case of spiritual dominion the person who possesses it has to be able to function as a type of Christ, but since woman cannot be the head of man (cf. I Corinthians 11:3) therefore women cannot be ordained.

Bonaventure proceeds to address the issue of certain “abbesses” who are seen in the New Testament (no examples being cited); such women do not hold the position of ordained prelates but rather a “substituted” position, whereby they are placed in a position of authority because of the perils which would be involved if men cohabited with them. (This, of course, is the very argument which Richard of Middleton raises with reference to the prophetess Anna, as noted above). Aquinas has a remarkably similar discussion, though he speaks of such women as appearing in both the New and the Old Testaments (the only example provided being Deborah from the Old Testament), and terms the power which abbesses have over other women as delegated or “commissioned,” *ex commissione*. The case of Deborah fits a little awkwardly into this treatment, for Aquinas goes on to say that her precedence was in temporal rather than sacerdotal matters, just as nowadays in certain cases women are able to rule temporally.

Turning finally to the matter of Biblical precedents for female preaching in particular, it must be admitted that in the *Sentences* commentaries the pickings are slim. Only one instance of a woman preaching appears in the entire series of expositions under review here. Duns Scotus uniquely introduces the case of Mary Magdalene, whom he describes as a female apostle (*apostola*) and preacher (*praedicatrix*), and a prefect over all sinful women. Duns simply refuses to admit that she might have set a precedent for other women. In his view the Magdalene was a single woman (*singularis mulier*, meaning both numerically one and unique), and exceptionally acceptable to Christ; therefore her privilege was a personal matter relating to her own person, and remained with her alone. This

apparent disinterest in Mary Magdalene may initially seem surprising, especially in view of the popularity of the legends concerning her preaching.¹⁰⁴ To take but one example, Mary's evangelical mission is well documented in the *Legenda aurea* of Iacopo da Varazze (Jacobus de Voragine), which is dated circa 1260. Having been expelled from Palestine and cast adrift with many other Christians in a rudderless boat, she lands at Marseilles and sets about attacking the pagan practices she finds there: "with well-chosen words [Mary] called them away from the cult of idols and preached Christ fervidly to them (*Christum constantissime predicabat*). All who heard her were in admiration at her beauty, her eloquence, and the sweetness of her message." When the governor comes to sacrifice to the heathen gods she "preaches Christ to him and dissuaded him from sacrificing (*Christum predicans sacrificia dissuasit*)."¹⁰⁵ There can be no doubt of either the frequency or the power of the Magdalene's preaching. However, the ordination discussions tend to focus rather on the belief that normally women cannot preach, on account of their female fallibilities and St. Paul's prohibition. A concomitant of this is that they are far more prepared to recognize the *propheta* than the *praedicatrix*. The distinction between preaching and prophecy is applied quite invidiously: it empowers certain women as prophets even as it undermines and restricts the possibility of women preachers.

Thomas Aquinas spells out the basis of this distinction in a question on whether the gift of wise and "scientific" speech (*gratia sermonis sapientiae et scientiae*) pertains to woman, although the term *praedicatio* does not appear.¹⁰⁶ Here Deborah and Huldah are cited along with the four daughters of Philip "who did prophesy" (Acts 21:9); moreover, Aquinas adds, St. Paul refers to women "praying or prophesying" (I Corinthians 11:5). Given that the gift of prophecy is a greater gift than the gift of speech, just as the contemplation of the truth is greater than its enunciation, it would seem that the gift of wise speech very much pertains to women. But, of course, the matter does not rest there. The gift of prophecy involves a mind (*mens*) illuminated by God, and as far as the mind is concerned there is no sexual difference (here he quotes Colossians 3:10–11—there is neither male nor female in Christ). The gift of speech, however, relates to the instruction of persons, among whom sexual difference is found. Aquinas also considers the significance of Proverbs 4:3–4, in which Solomon says that he was taught by his mother; this, he concludes, is private teaching, whereby a mother teaches her son.

Indeed, the contrast between public and private teaching is at the very center of Aquinas's response to this question. Speech of the kind under discussion, he explains, can be used in two ways: privately, with

one person speaking to a few others, familiarly conversing (*familiariter colloquendo*), and publicly, in church. Women may speak in the first manner but not in the second. For teaching and persuasion in church must be done by superiors, declares Aquinas, and not by inferiors. Moreover, women's speech would lead men into lecherous thoughts, as Ecclesiasticus 9:11 indicates when it warns that female "conversation burneth (*exardescit*) as fire."

The dialectic of "public *versus* private" is also crucial in Henry of Ghent's treatment of the question, "Whether a woman can be a teacher (*doctor, doctrix*) of theology." Solomon's mother appears again,¹⁰⁷ along with Deborah, Huldah, Anna (Luke 2:36–8), and Miriam (Exodus 15:20). Then again, at I Peter 4:10 we read that everyone who has received a gift should employ or manage it to common benefit, and since women sometimes receive the gift of knowledge, therefore they should share it with others, which they cannot do unless they teach. Thus, Mary Magdalene and Martha received the gift of different tongues along with the Apostles, and were sent out to teach and preach publicly just as the menfolk were.

Henry admits that *de facto* any knowledgeable person, whether male or female, old or young, religious or secular, cleric or lay, can teach what he or she knows, and then proceeds to make a distinction between teaching by office (*ex officio*) and teaching by special privilege, promotion or benefit (*ex beneficio*). Women cannot teach *ex officio*, given St. Paul's prohibition and their natural weaknesses (as noted above, p. 186), but *ex beneficio* it is perfectly permissible for a woman to teach, providing she has sound doctrine and that this is done privately and *in silentio*¹⁰⁸ rather than publicly and in church.¹⁰⁹ However, their audience should consist chiefly¹¹⁰ of other women and girls, but not men, because female speech would inflame men to lust (cf. yet again the idiom of Ecclesiasticus 9:9 and 11); besides, men would regard it as unseemly and shameful to be taught by women. The female prophets referred to in the Bible were given their gift for private rather than public instruction, and if men were taught thereby this was by a special dispensation, wherein divine grace did not respect sexual difference. The public preaching or teaching of women is acceptable only in special cases. For example, there were Old Testament women who did indeed prophesy, but this was a deliberate affront to men, because they had become effeminate; only in those special circumstances, and to make that particular point, were women set above men in a position of pedagogic superiority. (It would seem, on this occasion at least, that if men became like women, women had to become more like men.) Similarly, Henry continues, it was granted that Martha and Mary Magdalene should preach, and that Philip's daughters should prophesy publicly. But this, in Henry's view, was

due to a shortage of skilled labor in those productive times: since there were many harvests (of converts) to be made and a small number of laborers (cf. Luke 10:2), the aid of women was necessary. The clear implication is that, when there are enough men to do the job, the assistance of women should be dispensed with.

“Non licet mulieri viros docere, nisi speciali gratia praedita.” Thus Henry of Ghent brings to a close his *quaestio* on whether women can teach *ex officio*, this being the last of his summary conclusions. Women cannot teach men unless they are endowed with special grace. As he said a little earlier, in exceptional circumstances grace overrides the distinction of sex; “gratia . . . distinctionem sexuum non respicit.” Alcuin Blamires believes that here Henry leaves “the door ajar”: having been obliged to accommodate the possibility of “post-biblical female preaching” he has offered a defense and justification—however understated—for the activities of latter-day *praedicatrices*.¹¹¹ However, all the female preachers actually named in his discussion are exclusively Biblical. Henry may indeed have left the door ajar, but he has displayed no inclination to usher contemporary women through it. Someone who may have done just that was Eustace of Arras, though in my view his treatment is somewhat less surprising than has been suggested.¹¹² Can a woman merit the appropriate heavenly reward by preaching and teaching?¹¹³ In favor of this proposition is what the *Glossa ordinaria* has to say on Judges 4:4, where Deborah’s abilities as a prophet are described: frailty of sex (*sexus fragilitas*) is no impediment where there is sufficient purity of life (*vitae puritas*).¹¹⁴ If women who preach are pure in their lives— as in the cases of Saints Mary Magdalene and Catherine of Alexandria—there is nothing to prevent them from gaining that *aureola* or golden crown which is reserved for the good Christian preacher and teacher. After all, this reward does not respect the specific *conditiones* of mankind—the implication being that sex is irrelevant. Women can merit other crowns, such as those reserved for virgins and martyrs, so why not the one reserved for preachers? Against these arguments Eustace brings forth “the usual suspects.” Authority is required for preaching. The preacher must be “sent” in the way intimated by Romans 10:15, but it is evident from the words of St. Paul that this is not a fitting occupation for women: they should keep silent in church, and not presume to occupy a position of pedagogic superiority over men. Women who preach behave badly, and no one who behaves badly merits an *aureola*.

Eustache offers two different responses to the question, without indicating a preference for one over the other. “Some” emphasize that authority is essential for meritorious preaching, and since women lack that authority in church, if they preach they do not gain the

appropriate reward. *Non est officium mulieris*; such an activity is not appropriate to women. That point is not elaborated, but it would seem that, on this argument, the *officium mulieris* is antithetical to the *officium praedicatoris*. The vocation, duties, and responsibility of women are quite other: an extraordinarily totalizing assumption, which does not admit of exceptions (they come later, in Eustace's second response). Those who hold this view would say, Eustace explains, that the point about *vitae puritas* relates to a meritorious life rather than ecclesiastical office, and such is the *officium praedicationis*. Neither virginity nor martyrdom involves "office" or authority over others.

However, others piously believe—Eustace seems anxious to assure us that this is a perfectly respectable opinion—that holy women like Saint Mary Magdalene and Catherine of Alexandria merit celestial crowns, because even if they were not "sent" by a man (as by a prelate having that power)¹¹⁵ yet they preached at the instigation of the Holy Spirit and were "sent" by the Holy Spirit. The fact that they converted many important people to the faith in Christ affords clear evidence of their divinely sanctioned mission. Therefore it may be believed that God rewarded them appropriately for their labors, just as he rewarded those who were less worthy in their lives (like priests of dubious morality, for instance?). Once again, Eustace fails to develop the implications of a tantalizing remark. The argument seems to be that, while in normal circumstances preachers and teachers should indeed be "sent" out in the proper, formal manner, nevertheless in quite exceptional circumstances—when "the faith is at risk"—the Holy Spirit can override such considerations. Here, apparently, one should think in terms of miracles, extreme situations, quite special circumstances. Eustace then adds that when the Apostle said that women should not preach or teach, he was speaking of married women, because they belong to the "common state of women" (*in statu communi mulierum*), rather than those women who were specially elected and privileged (*specialiter electae et privilegiatae*) by God. In sum, while this second "opinion" redounds "to the praise and glory of all women saints," as Eustace puts it, this is at the expense of ordinary women and those activities (marriage, childbirth) which are deemed to be essentially "womanly," constitutive of the *officium mulieris*. One can only wonder what he would have made of St. Bridget, married woman and mother.¹¹⁶

Eustace therefore admits post-Biblical holy women and saints to the discussion, and what he says has clear implications for the successors of Saints Mary Magdalene and Catherine of Alexandria. *En passant* Thomas of Chobham's similar treatment of St. Catherine may be noted.¹¹⁷ When she heard that the emperor was violently

compelling faithful Christians to take part in pagan festivals and make wicked sacrifices to idols, of her own free will—she was neither called nor compelled—Catherine went to his palace to defend the faith. This constitutes a development of a principle which Chobham had laid down a little earlier in his treatise: while in general it is true that no layman or no woman can preach publicly, i.e., in church, nonetheless in times of necessity (*in tempore necessitatis*), as when the faith is threatened, anyone is able to preach, irrespective of condition, age, or sex.¹¹⁸ Here, as in Eustace's *quaestio*, there is no tacit statute of limitations on the potential for women to preach and teach, no attempt to assign them to some remote and ancient ghetto. The open-endedness, the implicit currency, of their doctrine seems, at least on the face of it, to stand in sharp contrast to the opinions of the *Sentences* commentators who, in this regard, seem to be (so to speak) living in the past and thinking of the past.

A clear testimony to this is the fact that, when our chosen schoolmen name a heretical sect which held that women could receive holy orders of some kind, they are looking back as far as the second half of the second century, to heap opprobrium on a group of Montanist heretics known as the Cataphrygians. (The name derives from Phrygia, the home of the putative leader of the movement, one Montanus. His followers were also called Pepuzians, after Pepuza in Phrygia, believed to be the place to where the Heavenly Jerusalem would soon descend.) The apocalyptic theology of this group valorized female as well as male prophets, and according to Bishop Epiphanius of Salamis (315–403) they gave thanks to Eve for eating of the tree of knowledge; moreover, it was claimed that they had women for their bishops, in honor of Eve. Two prophetesses in particular were associated with Montanus, namely Prisca or Priscilla (alternatively called Quintilla) and Maximilla. Thus St. Jerome, in his forty-first epistle (addressed to Marcella, whom the Montanists had tried to recruit) mocks their belief that God “descended by the Holy Spirit upon Montanus and those demented women Prisca and Maximilla; and that thus the mutilated and emasculate¹¹⁹ Montanus possessed a fullness of knowledge such as was never claimed by Paul,” for Paul was content to say, “We know in part, and we prophesy in part” and that now we see merely through a glass darkly (I Corinthians 13:9 and 12).¹²⁰

When the Cataphrygians appear in the *Sentences* commentaries—specifically, the commentaries of Fishacre, Bonaventure, and Thomas of Strasbourg—they are credited with the belief that women can be deaconesses or *presbyterae*.¹²¹ This claim is easily demolished with the argument (as already explained above) that in the ancient church the former term denoted those who were allowed to read a homily at

Matins while the latter referred to presbyters' wives or certain widows (or senior, respectable women) who looked after churches.¹²² Not much need be said here about this ancient sect; what is of significance for the present discussion is that an ancient rather than a modern sect is mentioned.

However, such lofty detachment from the contemporary world reflects quite normal academic practice, and is par for the course in the great *Sentences* commentaries and *summae*. The fact that these works do not cite directly some current *cause célèbre* need not mean that their authors were unaware of it or that it did not form some part of their motivation in formulating a particular *quaestio*. Moreover, on occasion a reference to a contemporary problem does indeed intrude, as when Henry of Ghent attacks those who translate the complex secrets of Scripture into the vernacular so that women may read them (a passage already cited above). Could Henry be worrying about the then-current practice of translating certain parts of the Bible into French? Or had he specifically in mind Waldensian Bible translation, which he was well placed to have known something about?¹²³ This is not clear; what is clear is that he is concerned with something contemporary. Returning once more to the *Sentences* commentaries, while (in at least the ones I have cited above) there is no clear or explicit reference to any contemporary heresy, the very fact that the translation issue was being discussed in the University of Paris at that time may be taken as a reaction, however oblique, to the role which the Waldensian heretics were supposed to have granted women within their sects.¹²⁴ Though it could be argued that by then the scare had passed its peak, there were sufficient reiterations to keep it alive.

Furthermore, it may be suggested that in the minds of at least some of the theologians who spoke about the power of abbesses was the challenge to male authority presented by certain high-ranking holy women who seemed to have spiritual power over men (rather than merely secular power, which could be accommodated with relative ease). An obvious case in point was the Order of Fontevrault, as founded by Robert Arbrisel, which had male and female members under the rule of a woman, and of course the Camaldolese and the Gilbertines were open to criticism for the high positions which they allowed to women, even though their supreme leaders were male. The perils of cohabitation could easily be raised in criticisms of such arrangements. The early thirteenth-century *Liber Sancti Gileberti* duly emphasizes the elaborate arrangements which Gilbert of Sempringham had made for the segregation of his monks and nuns. For instance, it explains that only the church where divine service was celebrated was "common to all, but then only for the solemn rite of the Mass, once or twice a day, and there is a wall which blocks it throughout so that the

men cannot be seen or the women heard.”¹²⁵

It is, however, more likely that the medieval theologians with whom we are dealing would have had in mind the case of the abbesses of Las Huelgas de Burgos, mainly because a letter (of 1210), in which Pope Innocent III protests that they have usurped certain clerical functions, had been included, in part, in the *Decretals* of Pope Gregory IX.¹²⁶ But none of the theologians I have read specifically refers to Las Huelgas, and only one of them, namely Peter of la Palud, cites Innocent’s letter explicitly. Peter also echoes Innocent’s idioms in spelling out that women are not permitted to preach or hear confessions.¹²⁷ Such citation is the less surprising if it is recalled that in his commentary on the fourth book of the *Sentences* Peter had introduced “his extensive knowledge of contemporary canon law into the corpus of theological speculation” (as Jean Dunbabin says),¹²⁸ this being the reason for that work’s popularity. There are, however, a few other occasions on which one may wonder if some of the other *Sentences* commentators (in my sample) are drawing on the pope’s language. Richard Fishacre points out that Christ denied the Virgin Mary the power of the keys (cf. Matthew 16:18–19) in terms which are reminiscent of a statement by Innocent.¹²⁹ Several of the *Sentences* commentators cite the case of Mary in discussing the non-ordination of women (as already noted), but Fishacre is the only one to mention the keys. There is no close verbal parallel in the texts of any of the others, namely Duns Scotus, Durandus, John of Bassoles, and Thomas of Strasbourg. Furthermore, when commentators like Bonaventure and Aquinas discuss abbesses their idioms and their emphases seem rather far removed from Innocent’s. Indeed, against this attempt to postulate some contemporary context it could be argued that the term “abbess” was a regular modernizing gloss for “deaconess” (as found in a *Decretum* gloss and elsewhere; cf. p. 188 above), and hence the late-medieval theologians were preserving the fossilized remains of crises from long ago.¹³⁰

And yet: given the frequent reiteration of the principle that holy women should not have power over men, it would be unwise to rule out the possibility that at least some of the theologians were responding, in their own abstract way, to concerns which were rather more pressing than the dubious practices of the long-dead Cataphrygians.

When we come to the vast *Doctrinale antiquitatum fidei catholicae ecclesiae* of Thomas Netter of Walden (c. 1375–1430), there is no doubt whatever about the source of the concern. Netter was confessor and/or advisor to no less than three Lancastrian kings (Henry IV, V, and VI), and a key ally of Archbishop Arundel in his proceedings against Lollardy. Netter took part in the trials of John Badby, John

Oldcastle, William Taylor, and William White, but his main contribution was undoubtedly the vigorously polemical *Doctrinale*, an exhaustive refutation of the views of Wyclif and his followers. In the section on ordination, Netter follows Ambrosiaster's refutation of the belief, as held by the Cataphrygians, that St. Paul approved of female deacons,¹³¹ in order to emphasize that Wyclif is worse than they were. For whereas they merely wanted to ordain female deacons he wanted to ordain female priests!¹³² Here is a real and present danger, threatening the England of his day.

III. UNNATURAL SELECTION: AUTHORIZATION THROUGH INSPIRATION

Before considering the validity of that startling charge against Wyclif, it is incumbent on us to investigate what was being done to promote contemporary or near-contemporary holy women, in light of the confining strategies discussed above. A full treatment of this matter is, of course, beyond the scope of the present chapter, the purpose of which is to provide a full reading context for the Wycliffite (or supposedly Wycliffite) views concerning female preaching and teaching which were circulating in Chaucer's day. Therefore the following account will concentrate on some of the authorizing strategies which were used in respect of Bridget of Sweden, with brief mention of how the claims of Elisabeth of Schönau, Mechthild of Magdeburg, and Angela of Foligno were spin-doctored by supportive clerics. In all these (and many other) cases, appeal to the inspiring "spirit of prophecy" was crucial. While prophecy was certainly valued in scholastic discussions of the ordination of women, its constitutive discourses were (as we have seen) deployed negatively within the process of repudiating female ministry, emphasis being placed on the fact that it had nothing to do with the sacrament of orders, and so its reception did not authorize women to act as or like priests. However, in defenses of the abovementioned holy women, those same discourses function positively, serving to segregate the chosen few from the "common state of women." Prophetic inspiration operated beyond the order of nature, enabling the *electae et privilegiatae* to live beyond their bodies of death, and speak in voices which were unhindered by that sexual provocation which was deemed characteristic of female speech. As Aquinas admits, because *sexus non est in anima* it is quite possible to find women who, as far as their souls are concerned, are better than many men (including, we may add, men who are ordained). So, then, let us find some of those women.

In theory, prophecy could come to anyone. It seemed to be no respecter of persons—or indeed of species, as the Almighty demonstrated when he inspired Balaam’s ass to speak (Numbers 22) in the process of showing this soothsayer that he was acting in a way displeasing to God. “If a donkey can be ordered to speak, so can a woman,” might reasonably be inferred as the standard misogynistic response. But the historical truth of this matter was more complicated, as I now hope to show, starting with St. Thomas Aquinas’s treatment of the question, “is moral goodness required for prophecy?”¹³³

That would seem to be the case, Aquinas argues initially, since prophecy is a gift of the Holy Spirit, and the Holy Spirit does not dwell in a sinner. Then again, something which cannot be put to an evil use cannot exist in a sinner. Given that prophecy, which is from the Holy Spirit, cannot be put to an evil use, therefore it cannot exist in a sinner. And “since God is best, He will never give the gift of prophecy to evil men.” Or it may be argued that, “since the good man is more disposed to receive the gift of prophecy than the evil man, it seems that it should be given much more to good men than to evil men. But it is not given to all good men. Therefore, it should not be given to any evil man.” Several contrary arguments then follow. It may be pointed out that “Balaam is said to have been a prophet, yet he was evil.” And in St. Matthew’s gospel (7:22), it seems to be admitted that the damned have prophesied in the name of the Lord. Therefore, it would seem that prophecy can exist in evil men. Finally, it may be argued that whoever lacks charity is evil, yet it would seem that prophecy can exist in one who does not have charity. I Corinthians 13:2 seems to allow the possibility that one may “know all mysteries” and yet lack charity. Therefore, prophecy can exist in a sinner.

Aquinas’s solution to the problem is that prophecy does not depend on charity, and therefore “faith, prophecy, and knowledge” can exist in both good men and evil men. Besides, “prophecy is given to a person for the profit of the Church and not for himself”; hence someone who is not good in himself may nevertheless “be of profit to the Church in some fashion.” Prophecy is indeed a gift of the Holy Spirit, but “the Holy Spirit is not given with the gift of prophecy, only with the gift of charity.” While the act of prophecy itself may never be made evil, yet it can be directed toward some evil end, due to the perverse will of man. The gift of prophecy is given discriminatingly—not to everyone, and not necessarily to those who are best disposed to receive it, but “only to those whom the divine will chooses.” The fact that “God is best” is manifested by the way He makes use “not only of good men, but also of evil men” to achieve his purposes (in bestowing the gift of prophecy as in other ways); this in no way “detracts from

His supreme goodness.” Aquinas also scotches the notion that a good man is always more fit to become a prophet than a sinner. Some people who lack charity have minds “more fit to perceive spiritual things, since they are free from carnal affections and worldly cares and are gifted with a natural clarity of understanding.” On the other hand, those who do have charity may be occupied with worldly business, “busy begetting children” for instance, or they may lack “a naturally acute understanding.” This explains why on occasion prophecy “is given to evil men and denied to some good men.”

What did all this mean for holy women? That, when the gift of prophecy was bestowed, their natural frailties, inferior subject-position and moral inadequacies were rendered irrelevant? Not quite. Aquinas freely admits that God may make good use of bad men, but he and his fellow-theologians found it difficult if not impossible to accept that the spirit of prophecy could be infused in bad women—or at least, they didn’t want to discuss it. Immoral priests could administer the sacraments; an immoral prophetess was a *rara avis* indeed. Rather the emphasis was placed on the holiness of a woman’s life, that *vitae puritas* extolled by Eustace of Arras. Ascertaining this was a vital part of the Church’s investigation of the credibility of a holy woman’s visions. “It must be determined whether the visionary is a person of good, sound judgment and common sense,”¹³⁴ declares Chancellor Jean Gerson in the *De probatione spirituum* which he wrote at the time of the Council of Constance in 1415, prompted by discussion in that same council concerning the canonization of saints and the examination of their doctrines, with particular regard to Bridget of Sweden.¹³⁵ The character of the individual, along with his or her education, habits, likes, and associates, is to be tested thoroughly. Gerson is particularly concerned to discover whether the person is motivated by hidden spiritual pride—hence reveling “in one’s humiliations, in wearing sackcloth and ashes, in fasting, and in virginity.”¹³⁶ He recommends that the investigator should deal quite robustly with the visionary, ridiculing her “as one whose heart is proud and her eyes lofty and who deals with matters too great and wonderful for her, so that she will not consider herself worthy to work out her salvation except in the way common to other human beings, namely, by the teaching of the Scriptures and the saints, and by the dictates of natural reason.”¹³⁷ In other words, such an individual should be encouraged “not to long for the extraordinary but to desire the ordinary way of salvation,”¹³⁸ which should be quite sufficient.

If the visionary is a woman, Gerson continues, it’s especially important to learn how she acts toward her confessors or instructors. “Is she prone to continual conversations, either under the pretext of frequent confession or in relating lengthy accounts of her visions?” he

asks suspiciously, evidently worried lest female garrulity may reduce spiritual matters to mere gossip. Moreover, women have an unhealthy and overactive curiosity; always seeking to learn, they never attain knowledge of the truth (cf. II Timothy 3:7). These attitudes are also writ large in the Chancellor's earlier treatise *De distinctione verarum visionum a falsis* (which attained its final form in 1401). He enthusiastically quotes St. Bernard's recommendation that a person "should hide his own virtues even from his most intimate and devoted friends" and inveighs against "useless talking" and the perils of arrogance and pride, which may prompt the visionary to disclose his or her revelations.¹³⁹ Following the revelation made to Zachary and Elizabeth concerning the naming of John, Elizabeth hid herself away for six months. Gerson seems to be of the opinion that many female visionaries should do like-wise—perhaps including Bridget of Sweden.

The purity of Bridget's life was ably defended in the *Defensorium* which Cardinal Adam Easton O.S.B. (a member of Gregory XI's curia which promoted Wyclif's condemnation in 1377) wrote during the period 1385–90 in response to a tract by an unknown Perugian theologian that had cast doubts on her claim to saintliness.¹⁴⁰ (The protracted canonization process, initiated upon Bridget's death in 1373 by her daughter Catherine, culminated in Boniface IX's promulgation of 1391.) Following her husband's death, Easton explains, Bridget dedicated herself principally to Christ and the glorious Virgin, lived a supremely good life, and was a special worshipper of God. It is "sufficiently probable" that Christ Himself should have dictated a new monastic rule "to such a devout lady."¹⁴¹ Furthermore, she was praying not just for herself but for others, desiring their salvation also. That also makes her revelation the more probable.¹⁴² Easton returns yet again to this notion of "great probability" in a later article, arguing that "Because Bridget was most devoted to Christ, and removed herself from all the pleasures of this world, and persevered to the end in prayers, pilgrimages and love, absenting herself from faults and sins, it is probable that Christ, by His own mouth, spoke and dictated the rule to her, and that He promulgated it by her, just as He spoke with Saints Agnes, Agatha, and with Cecelia and other of His brides."¹⁴³

Further precedents and parallels are offered of how God spoke "by His own mouth" to various saints. At Matthew 28 we learn that Christ appeared to "Mary Magdalene and the other Mary" and spoke of His resurrection. Is not that more difficult to believe than the proposition that Christ dictated by His own mouth the rule which the nuns are to observe in the monastery (at Vadstena) which Christ Himself ordered to be built in Sweden?¹⁴⁴ Then there are the cases of Saints Pachomius and Basil. A monastic rule was dictated to the former by Christ

Himself, while the latter received a similar revelation from an angel.¹⁴⁵ But Easton's prize parallel—offered without any hint of irony—is St. Paul, the arch-advocate of the silence of women in churches. Christ dictated holy Scripture to Paul in a way which is more or less similar (*similis sive minus*) to the way in which Christ dictated a rule for nuns to Bridget.¹⁴⁶ Easton is careful to admit that St. Paul and Bridget of Sweden were “perhaps not equal in merit.” However, they both lived distinguished (*preclarus*) lives, and their revelations had certain features in common.

Some of Gerson's suspicions about women who claimed to be *specialiter electae et privilegiatae* also feature in Easton's treatise, in the charges put by Bridget's “adversary,” the anonymous Perugian master. Particularly *au point* is the suggestion that Bridget lacked humility, and said rather more than she should, thereby engaging in what Gerson termed “useless talking.” Many devout and holy people experienced divine revelations which they concealed, declares the *adversarius*, lest they should be judged vainglorious.¹⁴⁷ It is astonishing therefore that this lady, regarded as so devout and holy, should immediately have informed her spiritual father of her revelation. Easton rushes to her defense. At the request of others, not necessarily of her own volition, Bridget did indeed disclose to some people certain things which were necessary to ensure the correction of their lives. Otherwise, the divine punishments which had been threatened in Cyprus¹⁴⁸ and in many other places would have come to pass. Bridget was acting in the manner which is common to seers and prophets, in proclaiming to the people their wicked deeds. Furthermore, he assures us, there were many things which Bridget *did* keep secret (*tenuit in secreta*) during her life, matters which were known only to her most devoted and private associates.¹⁴⁹ Here she followed the example of Christ, who wished only His familiars to know about His transfiguration: “Tell the vision to no man,” He orders them, “till the Son of man be risen from the dead” (Matthew 17:9). Similarly, the lady disclosed some of her revelations for the good of the people, but ensured that others were known only within her innermost circle. Thus, the objection put by the *adversarius* is nothing other than malicious.

Easton's treatise is of special importance to the present chapter for the ways it seeks to validate Bridget's ministry while dismissing any suspicions that she may inappropriately have assumed a public office or usurped sacerdotal privileges or prerogatives. James Schmidtke has called this “saving by faint praise,” suggesting that Easton's casting of Bridget in the role of a “special, unique or ‘incredible’ woman” may be seen as merely “less than zealously antifeminist.”¹⁵⁰ But Gerson's recommendation that people with dubious visionary aspirations

should be bullied into working out their salvation “in the way common to other human beings” may give us some insight into what he was up against; it was imperative that Easton should present her as “special, unique or ‘incredible.’” More generally, if the *Defensorium* be placed in the wider context of the orthodox rejection of the ordination of women, a more positive conclusion presents itself. Easton is remarkably clever at maneuvering Bridget into a position wherein her special gifts of divine grace are acknowledged and indeed celebrated, while any threat she may pose to the status quo is effectively defused.

In the seventh, and for our purposes the most crucial, article of the *Defensorium* Easton does this by deploying the familiar discourses of “public and private” and skillfully placing Bridget within her peer group of *electae et privilegiatae*.¹⁵¹ The *adversarius* had put the argument that Christ would not have wished to publish (*publicari*, to make public) the rule in question through a woman, whom the Apostle does not permit to speak in church; “and so the men, rather than the women, of that church or monastery are obligated to say the rule for perpetual observance.” In refuting this, Easton draws on St. Thomas Aquinas’s discussion of Christ’s appearance to the two Marys after his resurrection (following the account in Matthew 28).¹⁵² Aquinas had raised the possibility that witnessing the resurrection requires preaching in public. However, such behavior is unbecoming in women, according to I Corinthians 14:34, which enjoins silence on women in church. Therefore, it does not seem becoming for Christ’s resurrection to be manifested first of all to the women and afterward to mankind in general. In fact there is no problem here, declares Aquinas (and Easton after him). “A woman is not to be allowed to teach publicly in church; but she may be permitted to give familiar instruction to some people privately.” Furthermore, Christ appeared to the woman first for an important reason: just as a woman was the first to bring the source of death to man, so she was the first to announce the dawn of Christ’s glorious resurrection. Having quoted all this material from Aquinas, Easton applies it to the case of St. Bridget. The promulgation of her rule was through dictation by the mouth of Christ, the implication being that Bridget’s gender was unimportant given that she was merely the recipient of the divine message. Furthermore, the rule “was not publicly taught in church, but instead to one community of nuns.” Easton then quibbles with St. Paul’s declaration that a woman is not permitted to teach (*docere*) in church (1 Timothy 2:12). The *textus apostoli* does *not* say that a woman is not permitted to *speak* (*loqui*) in church! And therefore there is nothing to stop women saying “the rule for perpetual observance.”

Before explaining his reasoning here, Easton offers four reasons why women are not allowed to teach. The first reason given by “the

doctors” is that teaching “is the work of wisdom. But wisdom does not flourish in women because of the curse” and neither can a woman exercise dominion over a man. Second, according to general law, man rules woman and not the opposite, as Genesis 16:3 attests. Easton’s third reason brings to bear the relative powers of the male and the female in procreation. Here the man has the active role and the woman the passive, according to Aristotle’s *De generatione animalium*. Therefore, man is the head of woman, as I Corinthians 3:16 says. For all these reasons, it may be argued that a woman is frail, imprudent, subject and *de iure communi* unable to teach publicly as a *doctor* in church. Nevertheless, Easton counters, she is able to teach in the “domestic” sphere (*domestice*), this being such a privileged position in virtue and value that the Apostle did not prohibit it. Furthermore, Mary Magdalene was proclaimed a “female apostle” (*apostola*) in order to preach the faith. (The fact that this went beyond “domestic” teaching is not addressed here by Easton.) Therefore, the devout lady Bridget was quite justified in promulgating *domestice* to nuns a rule dictated by Christ Himself; that is something which St. Paul would certainly have allowed. It is not plausible that a devout lady like her would have embarked on an unlicensed course of action unless she was working under divine influence, as was St. Paul when he preached the evangelical law. What, then, of the suggestion that women are permitted to “speak” though not to teach in church? The Apostle himself gives a rule concerning women praying and prophesying—this should be done with their heads covered (I Corinthians 11:5)—which would not be possible without speaking. Consequently, a woman is able to speak in church in order to pray and prophesy. However, she cannot address the whole church without a special privilege or license.

There is some ambiguity concerning the meaning of “church” in this discussion—whether it refers in the broadest possible sense to “the Church” in general (which benefits from the declaration of prophecies), or in a more specific sense to any material location in which Christ is worshipped, including a nunnery, or in the exclusive sense of a designated church where a mixed audience of men and women come to worship. What is quite clear, however, is Easton’s concern to avoid any suggestion that Bridget usurped priestly functions, or invaded public space of the kind reserved for an ordained priest and his congregation. For him a nunnery is domestic space, and therein nuns can quite legitimately be taught and speak aloud their rule.

Thus an apparently explosive proposition turns out to be a damp squib. Easton remains well within the bounds of orthodoxy. When he returns to the episode of Christ’s appearance to Mary Magdalene, this

time following the account in John 20, his objective is to compare them not as preachers but rather as women who were honored exceptionally by God. A similar caution characterizes Easton's comparison of Bridget to other Biblical figures. Many women have had revelations from Jesus Christ, Easton declares, as Acts 2 makes clear. There the God who is "rich unto all that call upon him" (Romans 10:12) is described as bestowing the gifts of the Holy Spirit in abundance, one of the effects being that "your sons and your daughters shall prophesy" (Acts 2:17). Hence "there were women with the apostles on the day of Pentecost who received the Holy Spirit with them." And it is said in Acts 21:9 that Philip "had four daughters who did prophesy." It would appear that these women were prophets rather than preachers; Easton is maintaining this crucial distinction in a way that would have impressed even Henry of Ghent.¹⁵³

Some of these decorums are developed in a fifteenth-century text which was influenced by Easton's, the work of an anonymous Franciscan which has survived in Lincoln, Cathedral Library, MS 114 (fols. 18v-24v).¹⁵⁴ Here again we have the denial that Bridget preached in any formal sense of the term. Mary Magdalene is said to have announced the resurrection of Christ privately (*in silencio*); it was left to the male apostles to preach it publicly. Similarly, St. Bridget "did not preach her revelations publicly in church, but wrote them down *in silencio* and through men presented to the populace those things that were to be manifest." As Claire Sahlin has brought out well, Bridget "sometimes enlisted clerics to serve as her mouthpieces in church pulpits,"¹⁵⁵ and such preaching by proxy saved the appearances. However, towards the end of her life, she felt moved to address assemblies herself on the island of Cyprus and in Naples. A degree of caution is necessary in assessing the significance of these events, given that on Cyprus Alfonso of Jaén (Bridget's distinguished confessor) seems to have done at least some of the talking for her, and in Naples she remained silent while Alfonso read her prediction of divine wrath to the crowd. But it would seem that Bridget "often walked and sometimes overstepped the thin line drawn between public address and private instruction."¹⁵⁶

Three anonymous sermons, composed in the first half of the fifteenth century at Vadstena Abbey, follow suit.¹⁵⁷ Bridget is presented as having been sent by God to terrify sinners “with the thunder of the preaching of the revelations” (to quote from the first sermon, *De sancta Byrgitta in translacione*). The golden crown or *aureola* of the preacher is rightly hers, declares the monk with utter confidence, tacitly taking the disquisition of Eustace of Arras a stage further. True, at this point a quite general notion of “preaching” may well be in play. Bridget herself had experienced a vision in which Christ had told her, “just as the Apostles preached to many (*multis predicabant*), although not all were converted . . . so also it shall be with you, because even if not all will hear you, there will nevertheless be some who, from your words, will be edified and healed.”¹⁵⁸ There is nothing here to frighten the horses—only the apostles are actually designated as preachers, and while Bridget has supplied edifying and healing words for those who are willing to hear them (thereby engaging in what might loosely be termed “preaching”), the task of uttering those words publicly could well be left to the Church’s official spokesmen. But later in the same sermon we are assured that the Pauline prohibition of female teaching (I Timothy 2) does not apply to St. Bridget, since “she was privileged (*privilegiata erat*) by Christ.” In the very same sentence we are assured that “the privileges of a few do not constitute common law.”¹⁵⁹ The fact that Bridget joined the ranks of the *electae et privilegiatae* has no major implications for the female sex in general; ordinary women remain just as they are, stay where they were. Like Henry of Ghent and legions of *Sentences* commentators, this anonymous monk is convinced that the public preaching or teaching of women is acceptable only in very special cases. What is different here is the Birgittine brother’s desire to laud the founder of his order as one of the privileged few.

Affirming Biblical Precedent

Similar stories emerge from our sources for the lives of other late-medieval holy women who were deemed to be following in the footsteps of the biblical prophetesses. In the exhortation “to all readers” which is found at the beginning of the second book of visions of Elisabeth of Schönau (1129–65), her brother rebukes vigorously those who are scandalized because God has chosen to “magnify His mercy in the weak sex.” After all, he exclaims, this has happened before, “in the days of our fathers.” “When men were given over to negligence, holy women were filled with the spirit of God so that they prophesized, vigorously ruled the people of God, or even triumphed gloriously over the enemies of Israel, like Huldah, Deborah, Judith, Jael [cf. Judges 4:17ff.], and others of this sort.”¹⁶⁰ In like manner a

Dominican brother named Heinrich set about defending the credibility of the visions of Mechthild of Magdeburg (c. 1208–c. 1282/94) in his prologue to the *Lux divinitatis*.¹⁶¹ He too turns to the book of Judges (specifically 4:4–5), where the Israelites are described as visiting the holy woman Deborah to seek judgment in all matters. Likewise, the Fourth Book of Kings (22:14–20) “relates that Huldah, a prophetess living in Jerusalem, enlightened by the Holy Spirit as to the hidden judgment of God, informed the holy king Josiah about the coming scourges threatening the people.” At this time there certainly existed “high priests of the seed of Aaron” and many others “learned in the law and of high moral integrity.” Yet, despite the existence of all these distinguished men, “the Holy Spirit did not divulge his secret counsels to them. Rather, for these times he revealed them to these holy women of the weak sex, as he saw fit.” Heinrich draws the moral that often Almighty God “has chosen what is weak in the world to confound what is stronger” for its own good. Therefore, he continues, let no one wonder why God should renew His marvels in the present age, by revealing “His mysteries to the fragile sex.” Heinrich proceeds to extol the spiritual virtue of the *Lux divinitatis*. Thanks to Deborah’s prophecy the people of Israel “won freedom from oppression and victory over their enemies,” and thanks to the prayer and advice of the prophetess Huldah a king “was found worthy to gain solace and mercy.” A similar reward is in store for all those “who write or read this book, if they approach it with pious intent, and attain an increase in solace and spiritual grace.” Publisher’s blurbs rarely get better than this. But the powers of the book’s sacred source and subject, Mechthild of Magdeburg, have nevertheless been carefully limited.

At first sight, it may seem that greater powers are being claimed for Angela of Foligno (c. 1248–1309) in an epilogue found in some manuscripts of her visions: “Know, dear ones, that [Angela] is the teacher (*doctrix*) in the discipline of God and the one chosen (*electrix*) for this work.”¹⁶² However, it soon becomes evident that her “work” consisted in teaching by example and observance rather than by public address. “Learn along with me,” says her supporter, “that this rule, *preached by the observance* of our holy mother [i.e., Angela], is immortal!” The phrasing here is crucial—it is Angela’s *observantia* which has, so to speak, done the preaching; there is no suggestion whatever that this woman has assumed the *officium praedicatoris*. The “rule” in question here is the revived Franciscan rule, as the epilogue carefully explains. Since “the suffering-filled observance of it” by Saint Francis and his companions, the rule “has been dead in carnal men.” But now divine providence has sent Angela (a member of the Franciscan Third Order) to affirm its perpetual valence by her *observantia*. In other words, the rule which Angela metaphorically

“preached” did not originate with her but rather with St. Francis of Assisi. As one engaged in a revitalization of its already-existing tenets, this holy woman inevitably plays a secondary, supporting role.

Angela’s advocate plays absolutely safe by claiming that her activities have a clear (and confining) precedent in those of the prophetess Huldah. Here is proof positive that the gift of prophecy could be “transmitted to the female sex to shame men who are doctors of the law but who transgress the commandments of God.” This pronouncement follows a passage in St. Jerome’s *Dialogus contra Pelagianos*, wherein the prophetess Huldah’s calling is described as “a secret re-proof of the king, and priests, and all men.”¹⁶³ Perhaps here is the source of Henry of Ghent’s remark that certain Old Testament women prophesied as a deliberate affront to men who had become effeminate (cf. p. 194 above).¹⁶⁴ Angela’s supporter uses it to emphasize that “it is not against the order of providence that God, to men’s shame, made a woman a teacher (*doctrrix*)—and one that to my knowledge has no match on earth.” But no “official” status whatever is being claimed for Angela as teacher or preacher, and she was certainly not in the habit of addressing gatherings in public places.

Chaucer’s contemporary Julian of Norwich, writing (or having had written) down her visions in circumstances even more fraught than Angela’s, was equally circumspect: God forbid that anyone should say or suppose “that I am a techere, for I meene nouȝt soo, no I mente nevere so; for I am a womann, leued, febille and freylle.” Rather she speaks as one who has received a special divine gift from the sovereign teacher. Why should she not make known that gift just because she is a woman?¹⁶⁵ “Botte for I am a womann, schulde I therfore leve that I schulde nouȝt telle ȝowe the goodenes of god, syne that I sawe in that same tyme that is his wille,¹⁶⁶ that it be knawenn?”

Thus Julian elegantly locates the authority and *auctor*-ship of her treatise where she believes it belongs, with God Himself. And yet—in the very process of accepting the lewdness, febrility, and frailty of woman, she decorously but decisively affirms her value as witness to the truth, establishes her position as the divinely honored means of making it known.

IV. *SEXUS NON EST IN ANIMA*: HETERODOX REACTIONS

Here, then, are some of the ways in which medieval women—and/or the men who argued their case—faced the problem that while in theory *sexus non est in anima*, in practice *mulieres sanctae* could receive special gifts of grace but not holy orders, and could be accepted as prophets but not as preachers (except in special and specific circumstances). Albert the Great had remarked that the indignity of

guilt is greater than that of nature: so, if mortal sin does not hinder the reception of holy orders, then why should nature, specifically the female sex?¹⁶⁷ But the suggestion that the impediment of sin may be more substantial than the impediment of sex does not survive his subsequent discussion, which emphasizes that Christ ordained specially selected individuals, all of whom were men. Later Albert explains that the female sex does not debar women from prophesying (witness Anna and Philip's daughters), and hence there is no problem at all about designating the Virgin Mary as a *propheta*.¹⁶⁸ But not even the Blessed Virgin was ordained a priest, which seems to afford incontrovertible proof that no woman can be. Albert's successors, as we have seen, emphasized that while sex was merely a corporeal matter it could nevertheless debar women from the priesthood: the various priestly offices require corporeal mediation for their performance, but women's bodies are both inappropriate and inadequate for these purposes.

In Chaucer's day, however, such assumptions came under attack, as one of the consequences of Wycliffite doctrine of dominion,¹⁶⁹ which struck at the very essence of the orthodox rationale for the priesthood as an order. For Wyclif and many of his followers the fact that someone was eminent in the church hierarchy (whether priest, bishop, or pope) was no guarantee of that individual's righteousness. Only a person in a state of righteousness had true authority, and if certain individuals were evidently immoral then they had no authority. Conversely, every member of the true church, being one of the elect and a recipient of divine grace, was in effect a priest, having been ordained by God. The implications for preaching and the performance of other priestly functions were profound. As a Wycliffite tract which lists the sixteen "points on which the Bishops accuse Lollards" puts it, "euery good man is a prest and hap power to preche be worde of God."¹⁷⁰ And why not "every good woman" as well? Personal righteousness transcends the boundaries and barriers of gender. Therefore, if a woman is in a state of grace *that* is what empowers her rather than an official dispensation of the church hierarchy. Does it not follow that in such a state she has as much right to preach and administer the sacraments as has a similarly disposed man?

Views of this kind have been associated with the Welsh Lollard Walter Brut, "sinner, layman, husbandman and Christian," who was tried for heresy in 1391–93 by John Trefnant, Bishop of Hereford.¹⁷¹ A woman is capable of priestly power, the argument runs, because

the soul of man and the soul of woman are of the same particular species. Therefore, since the soul of man is capable of priestly power, it follows equally that the soul of woman is capable of the same power. The bodies of men and women are of the same

particular species, and so are their souls and also their composites [i.e., the combinations of body and soul which constitute persons]. Therefore, a woman is able to exercise whatever spiritual power a man can. . . . Nothing more is required for someone to become a priest except that he be admitted by God.¹⁷²

This passage appears to offer a radical reappraisal of the doctrine that *sexus non est in anima*,¹⁷³ going quite against the grain of the orthodox economy of sex, sacrament, and symbol which we reviewed above. But how much of its argument do we owe to Walter Brut himself, given that here we are dealing not with a trial record that purports to record his own words but rather with an attack on his views by one or more members of the team of theologians that Trefnant assembled? How radical were Brut's own views, insofar as we can recover them, what are their sources in Wyclif's own thought, and how significant were they in England in the closing decade of the fourteenth century? Answers will be sought to these questions in the remainder of this chapter.

John Wyclif: A Shameless Worker for Women?

An excellent point of departure is afforded by Thomas Netter's extraordinary charge that Wyclif was a shameless worker for women:

Wyclif himself was not embarrassed to labour frequently on behalf of woman (*non erubuit . . . pluries laborare pro foemina*) in his book *On [the Power of] The Pope*, to the end that she might be suitable as a priest of the Church, or a bishop, or a pope. I am ashamed to tell this story about a Christian man, a story which will be known to the Jews, will make a mockery of faith, and will be a scandal for the Saracens. But on the other hand, I am afraid to hide a whirlpool of such foulness: especially since from this very place [i.e., this text] I believe that his followers have assumed the authority of ordaining women priests, who are celebrating masses and other sacraments, being "readeresses" (*lectrices*) of the Scriptures and "preacheresses" (*praedicatrices*) in the gatherings of Lollards.¹⁷⁴

What Wyclif actually said in *De potestate pape* is, however, a lot more equivocal, indeed slippery, as I now hope to show.

This treatise, which dates from 1379, sets in stark opposition the present-day Church in all its imperfection and corruption and Wyclif's view of what the Church should be and essentially is. In the final analysis the Church comprises the elect, those predestined to glory (the *predestinati*) as opposed to those destined for damnation (the *presciti*). According to Wyclif, anyone who properly is named the head of the Church on earth has to be a close follower of Christ, the ultimate and eternal head of the Church. This amounts to the view that the pope should be one of the elect, and the most perfect person possible. But the reality was quite different, with many evil men—limbs of the devil rather than of Christ, as Wyclif puts it—daring to claim such exceptional power, a claim which was illegitimate given that they were not in a state of grace.¹⁷⁵

All of this follows from Wyclif's theory of dominion. However, the

specific consequences for holy women are far from clear in the eleventh chapter of *De potestate pape*, despite the solidity which Netter's attack confers on them. Following citation of St. Bernard's account of the ideal pope (who does not seek to build up temporal power and wealth), Wyclif contrasts the ways of Christ, who teaches of Himself in a hidden manner, with those of Antichrist, who promotes himself in a blatant, inordinate, and faithless manner—this following on from Wyclif's observation that nowadays the pope promotes himself over Christ, even though Christ is the only true head of the Church. Then, out of the blue, we are told that “against this”—the specific antecedent is unclear, presumably Wyclif has in mind what he sees as the current decadent state of the Church—many argue that a woman or a layman can be pope, on grounds of their holiness.¹⁷⁶ Following Christ's Ascension, the Virgin Mary followed Him more closely than any other person, and a layman can be better in his moral behavior than many a priest. But, Wyclif continues, against the first of these two propositions the objection may be raised that women are excluded from such high office because they are insufficiently like Christ in respect of the infirmity of their sex. No matter how holy a woman may be, *proper infirmitatem sexus* she is neither permitted to pray publicly in church nor to pray therein with her head uncovered.¹⁷⁷ A woman cannot be the head of the Church and as a *viator* (i.e., a “wayfarer,” a human being on “the path” of this life), isn't sufficiently close to Christ. Presumably Wyclif has in mind here corporeal closeness, and the burden of symbolism which the male body bears in scholastic exclusions of women from the priesthood, for he says that on the same argument both a woman and an angel are barred from being named pope.

But, Wyclif then asks, was there not once a female pope, called “Agnes” (this being the same figure as “Pope Joan”), as we read in Ralph Higden's *Polychronicon*?¹⁷⁸ I quote the relevant passage from the anonymous fifteenth-century English translation.

. . . hit is seide that this pope was a woman, and broughte in yonge age from here cuntre to Athenes in the habite of a man by her specialle [i.e., by her lover]; where sche profite so gretely yn connyng in so moche that sche comynge to Rome hade noble auditors and disciples, to whom sche redde the arte triviale. After that sche electe into pope by the favor of alle men, was gret with childe by her specialle; whiche not beyng in certeynte of the tyme of chilydng, and goyng from the church of Seynte Petyr to the church Lateranense, was delyvered betwene the Collosee and Seynte Clement, and beryede þer afterwarde as hit is seide.¹⁷⁹

Wyclif does not seem to doubt the truth of this account but by no means approves of Agnes's actions. It is evident, he declares, that she falsely trafficked with the name of pope. Here, it would seem, is further proof of the decadence of the papacy.

Moving on to the matter of whether a righteous layman can be

pope, Wyclif declares that, in the realm of sheer logic, this is quite possible. Here the “absolute power” of God is implicated, that principle of ultimate possibility which is well known to us from recent scholarship on fourteenth-century nominalist theology and philosophy, particularly the thought of William of Ockham, though the idea is of both earlier and wider currency. The realm of the *potentia absoluta* is best understood not as one of action but rather as one of capacity, comprising all the possibilities open to God, out of which He chose or chooses to do certain things, or to establish certain laws or procedures, *de potentia ordinata*.¹⁸⁰ Whatever God has done, does, or will do, falls within His ordained will, and most of this is understood as the present orders of nature and salvation. However, by His absolute power God could, for example, make an essence without existence, produce an accident without its subject, make the body of Christ be present in the absence of the host, remit guilt and punishment without created grace—and, indeed, destroy the air in a house while conserving its roof and walls, make water without any qualities at all, or create a human being without color.¹⁸¹ All these examples are taken from Ockham’s quodlibetal questions. For Ockham, as for his contemporaries in general, such extraordinary activities are restrained only inasmuch as God cannot do anything which involves a contradiction. For example, the *potentia absoluta* cannot produce infinitely many things simultaneously, conserve a thing along with its contrary, or make contradictories true at the same instant.¹⁸² But this seems a relatively minor statute of limitations. The *potentia Dei absoluta* remains quite awesome and can operate in ways which are surprising, even shocking, as viewed from the perspective of the status quo. It should be emphasized, however, that here we are dealing with things which God is able to do but might never do.

The extreme logical possibilities which Wyclif has in mind, at this point in his argument, are explained thus: “It is clear that logically a layman can be pope. It seems possible by the absolute power of God that everyone now living could be a limb of the devil or that the Church’s clerisy would cease to exist (*desit clerus ecclesie*), which would be even more marvelous.”¹⁸³ If I have understood this correctly, in the first instance Wyclif is saying that *de potentia Dei absoluta* any living person, no matter how pious he or she may be, can become an agent or instrument of the devil. If God wills this to happen, then so it shall be. The second extreme situation is less clear. In what sense would the entire clergy cease to exist—perhaps be rendered unable to function in terms of priestly power, despite the fact that they were properly ordained and formally appointed to various offices in the Church? This interpretation seems to fit with what Wyclif proceeds to say; there is no reason to suppose that he was imagining the

possibility of a wholesale divine massacre of the priestly class. He identifies as a “necessary proposition” the fact that there are many people, who lived or are living during the period which extends from the time of the Ascension until the Day of Judgment, “who are holier than those others who possess clerical *ordo* and status in a way that is repugnant to divine ordination.” Indeed, if the entire clergy was corrupt in comparison with the laity, then God could suddenly enlighten some lay person so that he would live in a holy, pure, and proper way according to the divine will. And then that person would be a cleric, even though he had learned none of the Seven Liberal Arts, and had not been ordained by human hand according to the episcopal rites. The evidence does not prove that this is what *has* happened (*de facto*), Wyclif continues, but it seems to suggest that such a thing *can* happen through the absolute power of God. The importance of personal worthiness, which ultimately means worthiness in the sight of God, is then affirmed. It is fitting that all the faithful should approve the choice of God in such matters, because one man does not choose another for some dignity or other without considering him to be worthy. But if a man is truly worthy, then he has been chosen by God as being worthy of trust. And so, no one ought to choose a man for an important position unless he thinks him chosen by God.¹⁸⁴

A major caveat: Wyclif is not claiming this argument unequivocally as his own here, although it clearly is in line with that association of authority with personal worthiness that is at the very center of his thinking on dominion.¹⁸⁵ Neither does Wyclif pursue it at this point; the prospect of female ministry recedes into the far distance as he chooses to inveigh against the notion that the primate of the Roman Church should claim supremacy over all ecclesiastical functions and rites. The Apostles did not let themselves be called heads of the Church; each and every one of them had the full plenitude of power which the pope now claims exclusively. True, in the Old Law there was a High Priest. But that ancient custom, like many others, lost its validity when Christ came, and so there is no reason for us to observe it— particularly when we do not follow the Old Law in many other matters, such as married clergy.¹⁸⁶ Sacerdotal powers exist equally and indivisibly in all priests, and too much stress is laid on difference in orders.¹⁸⁷ Yet it may be conceded that vestments may be used rightly—as an account of their origin and purpose will reveal.¹⁸⁸ Wyclif proceeds to describe the symbolic meaning which Old Testament vestments have under the New Law, taking them in the following sequence: the alb, the girdle of four colors, the *femoralia* or breeches, the inner tunic (*tunica interior vel iacinctina*), the ephod or chasuble, the breastplate, the miter, the gold plate on the miter, and finally the

other ornaments which are parts or accessories of the above-mentioned garments.¹⁸⁹ For example, the breeches symbolize chastity; the chasuble, fortitude and patience, and the breastplate, judgment. Four reasons for thus adorning priests are offered, with Wyclif explaining that the vestments signify parts of the universe. Certain ornaments are reserved to the high priest, while others are common to all priests, he declares—launching into an extensive explanation of their significance.¹⁹⁰

Then Wyclif suddenly declares—without any evident irony, despite the length of his own discussion of the subject—that excessive attention is paid to rites and vestments.¹⁹¹ However, his point here is that their significance is sometimes changed to evil, as may be exemplified by a consideration of all the ornaments deemed appropriate to a bishop: the cross, ring, sandals, miter, gloves, and pall. Since we neglect the thing signified we would be better without the sign! Wyclif proceeds to criticize the fanciful way in which certain signs have been moralized.¹⁹² Next he returns to consider the nature of the relationship between papal power and priestly *ordo*¹⁹³—is the former necessary for the existence of the latter? In answering in the negative, Wyclif asserts that it may be well to have a holy pope heading the Church, but nowadays we are suffering under a “Cesarean” papacy. St. Peter claimed no such authority over his followers. Why pretend, then, that such a monster is the head of Christ’s body? The following pages emphasize the importance of recognizing the most important church customs as those which are expressly enjoined in Scripture,¹⁹⁴ give an account of how present-day pharisees oppress the church without giving good reasons for their spurious traditions,¹⁹⁵ argue in favor of disendowment,¹⁹⁶ and assert that Christendom should unite to destroy the errors of the popes.¹⁹⁷ And so on and so forth—all at considerable length.

From this rambling discussion the key question eventually emerges, does the Church really need the leadership of dubious pontiffs? Wyclif’s answer is in the negative—it would continue to exist, and function perfectly well, without them. Nothing would be lost thereby. *Ordo* would continue to operate, priests would still exist, all of the sacraments would survive—for even a simple priest can administer any of them. In case of necessity a layman can baptize, so why then cannot a *sacerdos simplex* perform those rites which the pope claims as his prerogative? “Human laws or constitutions cannot contend against the law of God,” nor are to be believed unless they are in accord with reason.¹⁹⁸

Mention of baptism by a layman brings Wyclif’s mind back to consider further the argument that if a layman can baptize, so he should also be able to confirm, confect, and administer any of the

other sacraments. The usual argument against this proposition, Wyclif notes, is that it involves a *non sequitur* because of the difference between baptism and the other sacraments, baptism being more necessary than the others. But rather than lingering over that difference here, Wyclif returns to the *potentia absoluta* of God in posing the question, can God directly bestow priestly powers on certain unlikely individuals—including women? Some thirty-four pages (in Loserth's edition) from the time that Wyclif first raised the issue of female ministry, he has returned to it.

Those who base subtle arguments on the absolute power of God (*subtiliantes in Dei potencia absoluta*) say that inasmuch as God can communicate the power of making and administering any sacraments whatever not only to a layman but also to a woman or any other irrational creature, therefore such a person can [indeed] administer sacraments of this kind. I don't think that anyone will impugn this point, since there are many things which are necessary in absolute terms, which it is useless to preach to the people. And so I proceed broadly in this manner by limiting my discussion to legal power and the ordained power of God. Therefore I lay aside the examination of such conclusions, by revealing Catholic opinions, which I think are of benefit to the Church.¹⁹⁹

The recondite speculations of professional theologians were not meant to travel beyond the privileged confines of the schools—hence the remark that there are many things possible *de potentia Dei absoluta* which it would not be appropriate to mention in sermons. No need to shock the layfolk! But what is even more intriguing about this passage is the way in which it qualifies his earlier statement about the relationship between God's absolute power and irregular ministry.²⁰⁰ Now Wyclif is distancing himself somewhat from the notion that women can be priests by the *potentia Dei absoluta*, that God can choose to communicate sacerdotal power to a layman or a woman or “any other irrational creature.” His point is that this is a view put forward (or a view of the type which is put forward) by those who make subtle arguments involving the absolute power of God. Wyclif's own attitude to an argument which places women among “irrational creatures” is unclear, but the general tone here certainly does not imply approval for those *subtiliantes*.²⁰¹ This impression finds support in Wyclif's move away from their type of argumentation: he will limit his discussion to “legal power” (i.e., what is legally possible in the here and now, as recorded by canon law) and the *potentia Dei ordinata* (i.e., what is possible within what we have become accustomed to regard as the normative, the present orders of nature and salvation).

Thomas Netter will have none of this evasion. Having cited the passage from *De potestate pape* we have just reviewed, he juxtaposes it with a principle culled from another of Wyclif's works, the *Dialogus*: “Deus nichil potest facere nisi quod facit.”²⁰² God cannot do anything except what He does. Faced with this principle, Netter declares, a man

of good faith could not do anything other than conclude that, if God can convey to a woman or brute beast the power of confecting the Eucharist, then He does so. Hence the absolute and ordained powers of God are one and the same power (in Wyclif's thought, as here characterized by Netter), it being impossible to maintain any distinction between them. And if this fact isn't sufficiently clear already, Netter continues, it becomes utterly obvious when Wyclif says that he's going to limit his inquiry to what's legally possible and in accord with the ordained power of God. In other words, Netter sees this move as further proof that the "power distinction" is not a real option for Wyclif. As I've already noted, Wyclif had simply said that he was not taking up the option of arguing *de potentia Dei absoluta* (and in the process, disparaging those who have done just that), but rather focusing on the "ordained" order of things. But for Netter this is symptomatic of one of his opponent's core beliefs. The contingencies in question (communicating sacerdotal power to a layman, a woman, or "any other irrational creature") do not belong to some distant realm of ultimate possibility. They may well be happening right now. And that is the view for which Wyclif must be held to account.²⁰³

Thus Netter seeks to find a position from which he can get a clear shot at his elusive target. That task becomes much easier thanks to certain robust statements which Wyclif makes in *De potestate pape* shortly following his engagement with those *subtiliantes in Dei potencia absoluta*.²⁰⁴ The monstrosity of sin in a male who is destined for damnation would be a greater impediment to the reception and lawful ministration of whatever sacraments you please, than would bodily monstrosity, no matter how great, or the gender (*distincio sexus*) of a woman who is predestined to glory and adorned with the virtues. And yet, Wyclif continues, many men give more weight to the visible sign which has a human origin than to the invisible sign to which God has given a greater weight. (Presumably Albert the Great was one of those men—we may recall Albert's rebuttal of the suggestion that the impediment of sin is more substantial than the impediment of sex, as far as the authorization of ministry is concerned; moral goodness is quite different from the impersonal power which ordination bestows.)²⁰⁵ Wyclif proceeds to illustrate his point with the story of the *puella Agnes* (= Pope Joan), as narrated by Ralph Higden. In this case it is "human laws which say that she did not perform papal acts, and that she was not lawfully elected because of the unsuitability of her [female] body." But it is difficult to resolve such a problem with certainty, Wyclif continues, "for an election is generally invalid when someone is chosen who is unfit in the sight of God." Yet again, the implications of Wyclif's theory of dominion is evident, and here he is heading in the direction of Donatism (or what could be construed as

Donatism). Presumably he has in mind the story, as reported in Higden's *Polychronicon*, of how the *papissa* fornicated with her lover, the result being a child which was born as she made her way from St. Peter's to the Lateran Church. (And of course, she deceitfully assumed papal power in the first place, having disguised herself as a man.) From that evidence it could well be inferred that she was "unfit in the sight of God" (though Wyclif himself does not spell that out). "And so," Wyclif continues, "human institution has some difficulty in describing a true pope." I presume that means that it is practically impossible to come up with a description that will guarantee the election of a truly good pope; men are all too easily deceived by appearances. Since Pope Agnes/Joan was learned and looked like a man, her authority was accepted, but once her female form was discovered it was deemed to debar her from high office. But in the sight of God, the actions she performed as pope could well have been valid, and in the eyes of her contemporaries they were regarded as valid until the secret of her sex was revealed.

Wyclif is not necessarily speaking in defense of Pope Agnes/Joan in particular; we may recall his earlier remark that she falsely trafficked with the name of pope.²⁰⁶ Netter gets it absolutely right, I think, when he asserts that here Wyclif "seems to vigorously maintain that a *predestinate woman*"— which Joan does not seem to have been—"ought not to be debarred by her sex from being ordained to minister whatever sacraments you please. And again, that she can be ordained as a bishop or [even] a pope."²⁰⁷ In other words, Wyclif was going against traditional belief in supposing that it was not Joan's female form that was the problem but rather her moral state, and whether she was one of the *predestinati* or the *presciti*.

If further support for this reading is needed, it is provided by the way in which Wyclif proceeds to use a passage from St. Augustine's *De civitate Dei* (xx.10), wherein the Saint refers to the reward which Christ's true followers will receive at the Last Judgment.²⁰⁸ "They shall be priests of God and of Christ: and shall reign with him a thousand years," as the Apocalypse says (20:6), and "this refers not to the bishops alone, and presbyters, who are now specially called priests in the Church; but as we call all believers Christians on account of the mystical chrism, so we call all priests because they are members of the one Priest." Augustine adds that the Apostle Peter is referring to those members when he speaks of "A holy people, a royal priesthood" (I Peter 2:9). In Wyclif's view, here the real "priests of God" are being described, and they need not be identified with men who are officially designated as such by the Church. Ordination by God is far superior to material ordination by men. And from all this two things are clear, concludes Wyclif. First, that a woman may be a priest, and it cannot

be proved by either canon or civil law that Agnes was not a pope or that her papal actions were invalid. Secondly, all those men and women who are true members of Christ (i.e., predestined to glory) are priests, their power deriving from the communion of saints. St. John Chrysostom is credited with “beautifully teaching” this doctrine.

At last, Wyclif’s views have become sufficiently clear. And Netter refutes them without much ado. It is a relatively easy task for him to point out that Augustine and Chrysostom were seeking to honor the spiritual status of souls pleasing to God, with no intention whatever of devaluing the normative operation of priestly *ordo*. Being a member of the One Priest who is Christ, and destined for rich reward on Judgment Day, does not authorize one to perform all those priestly powers and prerogatives which, in the here and now, are dependent on ordination by a bishop.

What, to my mind, is even more troubling about Wyclif’s disquisition is its failure to discuss the consequences of its conclusions for the real world, or even consider whether they have any. There is no directive for action, no suggestion that the true priests of God—whether materially ordained or not, and including women—should step forward and claim exclusive rights of ministry. Indeed, such a move would be difficult if not impossible for Wyclif to make, given his many remarks (in *De potestate pape* and elsewhere) to the effect that one cannot presume to know the identity of the *predestinati*.²⁰⁹ And if we cannot know that, we cannot possibly know the membership of the “royal priesthood.” In sum, Wyclif has provided a means of neutralizing his own reasoning concerning dominion. Here is argument rendered impotent, speculation without issue.

Should we conclude, then, with Gordon Leff that since Wyclif held that God alone knows the state of grace of any individual, his doctrine of dominion therefore remained at the level of pure theory, “singularly devoid of intimacy,” “its practical consequences” being “reduced to nullity”?²¹⁰ Or endorse Michael Wilks’s stringent remark that Wyclif “took particular pleasure in indulging in lengthy speculation about divine possibilities,” knowing “full well that this speculation was to have no immediate results for human life”?²¹¹ Tempting though such courses of action may be (given the frustrations attendant on our attempt to pin down Wyclif’s views on women priests), I would urge caution. As Anne Hudson (addressing Leff’s statements) has pointed out, “even if only God could *know* the state of grace, man could make a pretty shrewd guess in cases of outrageous behaviour, even if certainty was impossible of access.”²¹² More fundamentally, Wyclif’s constant (and generally consistent) use of *dominium* theory throughout his *œuvre* is clear evidence of its central importance in his thinking, and therefore it can hardly be dismissed

because he failed to spell out some of its consequences. Besides, many of Wyclif's followers *did* spell out those consequences, which indicates that it "was not so plainly the academic speculation that modern critics have suggested."²¹³

Before proceeding to investigate what Wyclif's followers made of their master's theory, we should pose the question, can he really be regarded as a shameless worker for women, as Netter claimed? Hardly. His views on the subject of female ministry are inchoate, with many loose ends and substantial gaps, some of which I have tried to fill in above. The story of *puella Agnes* pulls him in different directions. On the one hand she affords him proof of the sorry state of the papacy; on the other, the fact that she possessed great "connyng," had taught many students in Rome the arts of the trivium,²¹⁴ and seemed well qualified to perform the functions of the papal office, raises the possibility that a woman can indeed serve as a priest, bishop, or pope. Then again, Wyclif wants to make the point that Agnes's contemporaries were (incorrectly) more concerned with her supposedly inappropriate female body than with her moral monstrosity, presumably an allusion to her deceitful accession to the high office of pope and the lusts which resulted in her downfall and public disgrace. It is difficult to sustain all these arguments simultaneously.

Furthermore, such views as Wyclif does express in support of female ministry are interspersed with discussions of other topics (such as the symbolism of priestly vestments) which seem equally, or even more, important to him. The topic of priestly vestments takes up thirteen pages in Loserth's edition of *De potestate pape*—far more space than Wyclif devoted to the topic of women priests, which, if all the relevant statements were brought together, would scarcely occupy four pages (though it would be difficult if not impossible to collate them thus, given the way in which they feature within larger arguments rather than being the singular focus of attention). So, then, did Wyclif care much about the possible ministry of those "irrational creatures," as a distinct and discrete issue? I wonder. It is hard to avoid the suspicion that he raised its specter in hammering home his argument that every predestinated person is truly a priest, as a means of gaining attention for that radical theory, but was insufficiently interested to think through the implications of some of his most startling remarks.

He certainly gained the attention of Thomas Netter, who regarded those remarks as a mockery of the faith and a whirlpool of foulness. If Netter was outraged by Wyclif's failure to feel shame for his outrageous advocacy of women, for the heresiarch's most recent readers the problem may be rather that he had little cause for shame.

It would seem, then, that (unfortunately) we can spare Wyclif's blushes.

Walter Brut: Female Ministry in the Absence of Men

An extraordinary amount of material has survived relating to the prosecution of the Welsh Lollard Walter Brut, in 1391–93; indeed this constitutes the single largest corpus of information about any “Ricardian” Lollard trial. First and foremost, we have the “diverse paper documents” (*diversas papiri cedulas*) which, according to Bishop Trefnant's register, were submitted by Brut himself, and are notarized therein in the form of five excursus.²¹⁵ The register also contains two extensive (though incomplete and somewhat rambling) refutations of Brut's testimony, the first by the Cambridge masters William Colville and John Necton, the second without any name attached to it.²¹⁶ A separate but directly relevant document, a response to Brut's views by the Franciscan William Woodford (c. 1339–c. 1397, one of the most formidable of Wyclif's early opponents), is partially preserved in Paris, Bibliothèque Nationale de France, MS Lat. 3381, fols. 115r–124v.²¹⁷ It may be eliminated from our discussion at the outset, since (at least in the form in which it has come down to us) it does not include any comment on women priests. Finally, we have a set of four *quaestiones*²¹⁸ which, it is reasonable to assume, were produced by the panel of experts assembled by the Bishop of Hereford to investigate Brut's opinions.²¹⁹ These documents are of the greatest importance for the present inquiry, since they present arguments in favor of what may be called the laicization of priestly prerogatives with surprising fullness, before refuting them with equal thoroughness. The issue of female ministry features prominently—in marked contrast to the quite small amount of space which Brut himself devoted to it in his *cedulae*. Having spent a long time studying the Harley *quaestiones*, I have come (reluctantly) to the conclusion that the elaborate arguments in favor of female ministry which they include may have owed relatively little to Brut's own views, and we need not leap to the conclusion that Brut's opponents had access to additional records of the Welshman's views which have not come down to us.²²⁰ Rather these questions may be read as a substantial amplification of what Brut had said, provoked at least in part by the sections of Wyclif's *De potestate pape*, chapter 11, which were discussed above. If I am right, the irony is rich indeed: the most extensive treatment of women priests in late-medieval England came not from the Lollards but from their opponents, who built up their heretical arguments in order to knock them down. The nature of this *edificatio* and *destructio* will now be investigated, starting off with Brut's own words—or, rather, Brut's own words as recorded in the trial records.

Only the third of the excursus in Trefnant's register has anything to say about women priests and preachers,²²¹ and so we must start from there. The first part of this document is taken up with an attack on the doctrine of transubstantiation, Brut's parting shot being a *reductio ad absurdum* of the conventional doctrine that if a mouse should eat a host which had negligently been left unattended, the sacrament returns again to "the nature of bread."²²² Behold how a miracle has been wrought by the negligence of the priest, in turning the bread back into what it had been before that same priest had confected the sacrament! Either the mouse effects the transubstantiation of Christ's body into bread by its action of eating, or the bread is created anew, *ex nihilo*—"either of these operations is to be marvelled at," declares Brut contemptuously.

Then Brut turns his attention to three other issues: whether a woman may make the body of Christ and minister it unto the people, whether priests are divided from the layfolk by their knowledge and holiness or merely by external signs, and whether the sign of the tonsure and other external signs of holiness in priests are signs of Antichrist or were introduced and taught by our Lord Jesus Christ. A brief history of the priesthood follows, beginning with the Aaronical (the legal and temporal sort), moving on to the order of Melchizedek (the eternal and regal sort), and culminating with the priesthood of Christ, wherein Jesus sought to make little difference between the priests and the rest of the people, calling his followers "disciples" or "apostles" rather than employing terms like *sacerdos* and *presbyter* (which were introduced later). Alas, the church of Rome brought in a fourth order of priesthood, wherein a distinction is indeed made between clergy and layfolk, with a clerical hierarchy and the priestly tonsure having been introduced. "But in the primitive Church it was not so," declares Brut. Christ's new commandment was to "love one another," but "love began to wax cold, or rather to be frozen for cold," in a time of great anxiety and persecution. The Church became idolatrous, and "that which was ordained and constituted for a memorial of the one and only sacrifice, was altered, for want of love, into the reality of the sacrifice itself."²²³

"Having made these comments," Brut continues, "let us see whether women are able . . . to effect this sacrament [of the Eucharist] and administer it to the people."²²⁴ It would seem that they are, because women are able to baptize, and the sacrament of baptism is deemed the most necessary of all (cf. the orthodox theological assertions to this effect discussed on pp. 63–68 above). If women can administer this principal sacrament, why not the others? But then Brut seems to back away from the consequences of this argument. "I do not wish to state that the administering of any sacrament is appropriate

for them or for laymen, however good they are, *except in the absence of others constituted for this purpose in the Church.*” On the face of it, this looks like impeccably orthodox doctrine, as reiterated in generations of commentaries on the fourth book of Peter Lombard’s *Sentences*.²²⁵ What makes it different here, however, is the suggestion that not only baptism but also the other sacraments may be administered by a woman if no priest is present. Yet, nevertheless, Brut seems to be maintaining the very distinction between priests and other Christians which a little earlier he seemed keen to dissolve.

He persists in this vein by asserting that teaching and preaching of the divine word is appropriate to priests, and they have been ordered to do this in the Church by Christ Himself as much as by the Apostles. And women do have a role here. True, St. Paul says that women should learn *in silencio* with all subjection and does not permit women to teach or exercise authority over men (*in virum dominari*). But Paul does not say that women are unable (*non possunt*) to do these things —“nor do I presume to affirm it,” declares Brut, “since women, holy virgins, steadfastly preached the word of God and have converted many to the faith while priests dared not speak a word.”²²⁶ Emphasizing the importance of preaching, he declares that this activity is superior to administering the Eucharist.²²⁷ (Given that preaching is not a sacrament, its elevation here is all the more significant, yet another clear indication of Lollard denigration of the traditional sacramental system *in toto*.) Returning to baptism, Brut argues that since this involves the remission of sins, women absolve from sin those they baptize; hence they have the power of “loosing” from sin. Given that the powers of “loosing” and “binding” are interrelated (cf. Matthew 16:19) women would seem to have them both. Since these are priestly powers, it follows that women are not excluded from the Christian priesthood—“even though their power is restrained as long as others are ordained to perform the priestly office.” Once again, a crucial qualification, apparently prompted by the belief that if a priest is present it is up to him to carry out those sacerdotal functions which are the prerogatives of his office. Significantly, Brut mentions the sacrament of baptism in his very next sentence—that sacrament which may be performed by non-ordained persons, whether male or female, if no priest is available. In administering this sacrament, Brut asserts, women confer the Holy Spirit on those who are baptized in the name of the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. Furthermore, they fulfill the sacrament of marriage, “since that sacrament is effected in the words” of the man and woman who are getting married, “not in the words of the priest when he blesses them.”²²⁸

It would seem, then, that women can administer many of the

sacraments which priests are supposed to administer. So why cannot they administer all of them? Brut proceeds to argue that women can effect the sacrament of ordination, since for more than two years Pope Joan “conferred diverse orders on diverse people.” If all Joan’s actions are dismissed as groundless, then the apostolic succession itself is put under threat, because “certain popes and priests” alive today may have been ordained “in succession to those she ordained.” The pressure is on orthodox theologians to concede that her ministrations were valid, it would seem. And if this is indeed the case, “why should good women not now be able to administer sacraments since she, a fornicator, administered such things?” This application of the story of the *papissa* is at once far simpler and far more effective than the uses to which Wyclif put it in the convoluted arguments of *De potestate pape*, chapter 11.

Moving on to the sacrament of extreme unction, Brut does not see why women should be excluded from administering that either. And the crucial thing about this sacrament, he adds, is that it functions *de honestate sacramentum* rather than *de necessitate recipiendum*: that is to say, the dignity of the sacrament itself is important rather than the necessity of its reception (as in the case of baptism). Presumably the point being made here is that one cannot minimize the significance of a woman administering extreme unction by saying that, because the recipient simply has to have it, whoever gives it to him is relatively unimportant—for the dignity of a good woman is commensurate with the dignity of the sacrament.

The Lollard now seems ready to launch a similar justification of women as confectors of the Eucharist. He begins confidently enough, quoting canon law on the ubiquitous belief that in the consecration of the body of Christ “a good priest is no more efficacious than a bad one and a bad one no less efficacious than a good one.”²²⁹ It is not through the personal virtue of the priest but by virtue of the words of Christ—it being Christ’s power which is involved here—that the bread is consecrated as the *corpus Christi*. If God effects this consecration “at the invocation of an evil priest, I do not see why He could not do the same at the invocation of a holy woman” who acts out of “reverent love (*ex pia affeccione*).” Anyone who denies this, Brut asserts, would be claiming that the power of Christ is limited by the rules of the Roman pope. Which is, of course, impossible to maintain: “that cannot really be said, considering the omnipotence of Christ, which is not to be limited by any finite power.”²³⁰

If Christ were to effect this sacrament on the invocation of a holy woman uttering those sacramental words, Brut asks rhetorically, how would this differ from that which is consecrated by priests? His readers are then invited to recall the many miracles that Christ

performed for women and at their request—turning water to wine at his mother’s request (John 2:1), raising Lazarus from the dead at the request of Mary and Martha (John 11:1–44), imprinting the image of his face on a linen cloth for Veronica to remember him by. How then can we say that Christ could not or would not consecrate bread into His body at the request of a holy woman who has the right intention and says the right words? “Taking all these things into account, I dare not claim, unless I am otherwise taught, that women are unable to consecrate the body of Christ.”²³¹

But then comes the (by now quite predictable) qualification: “. . . though I do agree that it is not fitting for women or laymen to do this where there are those present who are in the Church to administer the sacraments. . .”²³² Although willing to allow that in the normal run of things women can baptize, confer holy orders and extreme unction, and preach, when the sacrament of the altar is in question Brut seems unwilling to push his views to what might be deemed their logical conclusion. Radical his views certainly are, but they are not quite as radical as has been suggested in some recent scholarship. For the Welsh Lollard seems to want to retain one vestige, perhaps it may be termed a fig leaf, from orthodoxy: women should presume to minister only in the absence of those men who are properly “constituted” to do so in the church. For which one must read, ordained priests. We are some distance away from the notion of regular and routine ministry by women. Their role seems, at best, supplemental.

Here, then, is the sum total of Brut’s views on women priests as preserved in Trefnant’s register—occupying a mere two pages (approximately) of the 173 pages devoted to Brut’s excursus in Capes’s edition. The two refutations of Brut’s testimony which follow (the first by Colville and Necton, the second unascrbed) do not treat the belief that women may possess the power and authority to preach and confect the body of Christ, along with the power of the keys of the Church, as a major issue in its own right. Instead it is lumped together with two other issues: the offering of the body of Christ on the altar is not the sole prerogative of priests, and this offering is not a present sacrifice for the sins of mankind but merely the memorial of a past sacrifice. All of these “heretical and false” propositions are seen as interconnected inasmuch as a merely memorial sacrament may be offered by good Christians in general, even by women, and hence it follows (on this analysis of Brut’s argument) that women can preach the word of God and administer all the sacraments of the Church.²³³ This account occupies less than one page *in toto* in Capes’s edition.²³⁴ For comprehensive arguments for and against women preachers and priests, as provoked by the Brut trial, we must turn to the Harley *quaestiones*.

Confronting the *praedicatrix*

The first of these questions, *Utrum liceat mulieribus docere viros publice congregatos*,²³⁵ starts by deploying an *auctoritas* in favor of female ministry—viz. Solomon seems to have been taught by his mother—which had been cited in both Thomas Aquinas’s question on whether the gift of wise and “scientific” speech pertains to woman (*Summa theologiae*, 2a 2ae, qu. 177, art. 2) and Henry of Ghent’s question on whether a woman can be a *doctor seu doctrix* of theology (*Summa*, prol., art. 11, qu. 2).²³⁶ These scholastic sources dominate the subsequent discussion.

Trefnant’s theologian proceeds to offer three further arguments *pro*, beginning with the one that whoever is fit to prophesy is fit to preach, and since women (Deborah, Huldah, and Philip’s four daughters) have been permitted to prophesy it follows that they should be allowed to preach. Second, everyone who has the grace of wisdom and knowledge should share it with the ignorant, and if women receive such grace they are obliged to pass it on to others through teaching. Finally, to teach is one of the spiritual works of mercy, and since no one is forbidden to perform these works (and indeed everyone is required to perform them), it follows that women are permitted to teach. Two further arguments follow by way of confirmation. If it is a sin to withdraw from the needy those alms which will sustain the body, how much more is it to withdraw alms from those in spiritual need? Hence women are obliged to teach the spiritually needy. Then there is the clear precedent of Mary Magdalene, the *apostola apostolorum*, who publicly preached in Marcilia and the surrounding region. Against all this, of course, are the words of St. Paul, “I permit not a woman to teach” (I Timothy 2:12).

The first conclusion begins with the declaration that women are not permitted to teach men publicly in Church. Only those who are allowed to investigate the subtleties of Scripture are permitted to teach in this way—and this is denied to women. St. Paul’s words at I Corinthians 3:2, “I gave you milk to drink, not meat,” are interpreted as meaning that higher things should not be preached to those with inferior capacities. But against this, another gloss declares that it is not necessary to keep doctrine secret from the humbler brethren, keeping it only for the mature members of the Church; after all, the Apostle preached to both the spiritual and the carnal, giving the former meat and the latter milk to drink. Therefore he says, “I could not speak to you as unto spiritual, but as unto carnal” (I Corinthians 3:1); in other words, you are unable to receive what I say to you as spiritual but rather as carnal people, and just as the cross is foolishness to some and a scandal to others (cf. I Corinthians 1:18, 23)

one and the same doctrine is solid food to some and milk to others, according to the differences in their capacities.

Brut's opponent proceeds to clear up the apparent discrepancies between the various glosses. In a manner highly reminiscent of Henry of Ghent's resolution of the issue of whether women should be taught theology (cf. pp. 184–85 above), it is stated that everyone should be educated in those things which are necessary for salvation, but certain things which are *not* necessary should be withheld from the laity. Such discrimination is defended on the grounds that God has given to everyone a certain "measure of faith" (Romans 12:3) and each and every person has his—or her, it is implied—"proper ability" or capacity (Matthew 25:15). An elaborate exegesis is then offered of Exodus 21:33–34: "if a man open a pit, and dig one, and cover it not, and an ox or an ass fall into it, the owner of the pit shall pay the price of the beasts." That is to say, if someone explores profound wisdom and high science but does not conceal it (through his discreet silence) from those lacking in wisdom, both the clean and the unclean, the faithful and the unfaithful, will fall into the pit of sin—and its owner will pay the price of appropriate penance. In sum, "a preacher ought to consider, not what it may suit him to teach, but what is suitable for ordinary people to know."²³⁷

Still within this first conclusion, a series of further declarations are provided. First there is the appeal to the hierarchical principle that the *maiores* ought to teach the *minores*; it is the proper task of priests and preachers to enlighten and advance lay people, including women, and not the other way around. Then the help of Thomas Aquinas is enlisted explicitly.²³⁸ Woman is subject to man by nature or at least by divine *institucio*, and therefore is in no position to teach publicly; furthermore, the sensual voices of women "ignite men like fire," and generally they have weak and unstable natures and are lacking in wisdom. The second of these propositions is amplified by Brut's opponent. "You may say that this does not apply to a holy and devout woman, but to a wicked or foolish one." But this would be wrong, because a man "ought to be *more* attracted by the beauty and soft voice of a good woman than of a bad because he knows that the first will keep faith with him but the second will not." Moral virtue in a woman, then, seems to make the problem even worse: the implication is that the best women make the worst teachers, because they will sexually excite rather than "benefit" men!

Henry of Ghent's four reasons for the exclusion of women from the ministry are then reiterated: women lack constancy of teaching, effectiveness of performance, the requisite authority, and strength and vigor of speech (cf. p. 186 above). For all these reasons Brut's opponent thinks that "it is heretical to say that a woman should be

allowed to teach men in public.” True, St. Paul declared that “all can prophesy so that all may learn” (cf. I Corinthians 14:31), this does not mean that women may teach in public just like men can. Here, once again, the vital distinction between prophesying and preaching is brought into play.²³⁹ Women cannot teach in public and *ex officio*, and if a woman wishes to learn she should ask her husband at home.

However, in the *secunda conclusio* it is conceded (once again following Aquinas and Henry of Ghent) that women may teach other women and children, assuming of course they are in possession of correct doctrine. Aquinas’s distinction between teaching publicly (to the entire Church) and privately (to one individual or just a few people, in the form of familiar conversation) is then quoted, followed by Henry’s distinction between teaching by authority and office on the one hand, and teaching due to some special benefit or privilege (as motivated by the ardor of charity) on the other. In his *tercia conclusio* Brut’s opponent makes an even further concession, to the effect that the public teaching of women is permissible for three reasons: because of a special gift of grace, as a reproach to men who have become effeminate (which justifies Deborah’s actions), and because there were so many people to proselytize that women had to help out the men. The last of these reasons explains the preaching of Mary Magdalene and the public prophesying of Philip’s daughters. Yet again, this follows Henry, while the subsequent neutralization of Proverbs 4:4 (was Solomon’s mother his *doctor*?) is in line with the solutions of both Henry and St. Thomas. Our anonymous theologian is on his own, however, in disposing of the proposition that performance of the works of mercy requires women to teach. Women should indeed perform works of mercy, he explains, even though such activity is not essential for their salvation. But this does not include the specific work of public teaching. To refuse bodily and spiritual alms to the needy is sinful when they cannot be assisted in any other way; however, this is not the case in respect of teaching the laity, which is the official task of prelates and teachers, men who are there to ensure that this particular need is met.²⁴⁰ Of course, Brut’s opponent adds, when there are few teachers and many are in need of preaching, in these very special circumstances women can preach and teach, as in the cases of Mary Magdalene and Martha.²⁴¹

In a final rhetorical flourish, the author of *Utrum liceat mulieribus docere viros publice congregatos* declares that the whole subject can be reduced to one question and one alone: can a person preach or teach when this is likely to harm rather than benefit the audience? As has been made clear in Chapter 1 above, this same question was at the very center of debate on whether an immoral preacher would help or harm his congregation. Again and again, theologians emphasized the

importance of trusting the doctrine rather than the *doctor*, of listening to the words of God rather than the accents of the unworthy human mouthpiece (assuming that he was not a blatant source of scandal, of course). But such tolerance is not extended to women, as Trefnant's theologian moves to consolidate his exclusion of the female sex from public office. His choice of concluding argument is highly revealing. Rather than appealing to proofs *ex institutione* and from sacramental symbolism he resorts to a point which, within the armory of arguments against female ministry, seems relatively trivial; however, this is one of the few points in this (quite unoriginal) *quaestio* to which he had made some personal contribution, albeit merely by way of amplification of what he had found in Thomas Aquinas and Henry of Ghent. "It is likely that a beautiful woman will inflame her hearers to lechery by the sweetness of her words more than she will extinguish it." A consolation prize is then offered, in the traditional (and traditionally discriminatory) appeal to diversity:²⁴² people administer divinely sent grace in different ways according to the diversity of their conditions. If women are granted the grace of wisdom and learning, they *can* administer it—*secundum priuatam doctrinam et non publicam*. Cold comfort. Woman's *condicio* presents an inevitable impediment to public ministry, and her ever-provocative voice renders the teaching of men an impossibility.

A comparable dismissal of female preaching is included in Thomas Netter's *Doctrinale*, by way of an attack on the relevant arguments in John Purvey's *De compendiis scripturarum, paternarum doctrinarum et canonem*. This work has not survived, and its contents can only be inferred from Netter's hostile account, the polemical style of which is very different from the measured *sic et non* procedures of the Harley *quaestiones*. Netter represents Purvey as having extended the *officium praedicatoris* very widely, allowing it to very many different kinds of layfolk, including women. Jerome's strictures on those unqualified persons who think that they can understand holy writ are quoted with warm approval. Garrulous old women, doting old men, and wordy sophists rend the Scriptures in pieces and teach them before they have learned them. Some philosophize concerning the sacred scriptures among weak women. Others learn from women what they are to teach men.²⁴³ Netter echoes Jerome's words: "I blush to say it! Behold women teaching men the divine scriptures!"²⁴⁴ (These words have a special resonance for Chaucer's Bible-thumping Wife of Bath, as I will argue in the next chapter.) It is one thing, Netter continues, to teach *ex officio et auctoritate* and quite another to teach *ex necessitate et amabilius*. The women teachers mentioned in holy Scripture are placed in the latter category. *Ex necessitate* teaching is explained by analogy with what happens on board a ship in time of peril. Even

though the ship's safety is entrusted to its captain, when a storm strikes every sailor does whatever he can to help.²⁴⁵ Thus, Judith instructed certain priests at a time of extreme peril (Judith 8:9–31). This was done not *ex officio* but as one rendering assistance. In the same way, Mary Magdalene preached in the time of the primitive Church. After the Ascension the Virgin Mary taught the Apostles, but this was done *amicabiliter*, in the manner in which a friend teaches a friend; as a friend of the faith Mary shared those secrets concerning the Incarnation which only she knew. Netter also mentions the cases of the women who at Jeremiah 9:20 were told to receive the word of the Lord “and teach your daughters wailing, and every one her neighbour mourning,” the Samaritan woman who went into the city to proclaim Christ to the men there (John 4:28–29), and Evodia and Syntyche (Philippians 4:3). None of the women he has named, Netter declares, possessed the *magisterium* of teacher, which is contrary to the sexual hierarchy. A woman would rule over a man if she exercised the *magisterium docendi* over him. The female sex cannot exercise such power, and cannot teach authoritatively. But teaching within the home is a very different matter, Netter continues; that women certainly can do. There they may educate girls and boys, and in particular they should teach members of their own sex, especially the virtues of prudence and chastity.

At this point Netter cites St. Jerome's admiring account of the exemplary behavior of Marcella.²⁴⁶ Having been instructed by Jerome, after his departure from Rome she was often called upon to settle debates concerning the testimony of Scripture. On those occasions Marcella made it abundantly clear that she was not responsible for the answers she provided: “she gave her own opinion not as her own but as from me or some one else, thus admitting that what she taught she had herself learned from others. For she knew that the Apostle had said; ‘I suffer not a woman to teach’ (I Timothy 2:12), and she would not seem to inflict a wrong upon the male sex many of whom (including sometimes priests) sometimes questioned her concerning obscure and doubtful points.” Behold, exclaims Netter, a devout and prudent woman who wished to edify and scorned to usurp, behaving in a way which is appropriate to her sex. She made it clear that she was a pupil (*discipulus*) rather than a master (*magister*), for women cannot teach publicly.

However, Netter does not cite Purvey as having pronounced on the even more radical proposition that women can administer the sacraments, even the sacrament of the altar. For that doctrine we have to return to Brut's terse statements as recorded in Trefnant's register, and the anti-Brut *quaestiones* as preserved in their fullest form in Harley 31. Whereas Netter gave Purvey's views little space, being

more concerned to refute them rather than report them, the Harley *quaestiones* are quite generous in suggesting ideological bases for Brut's propositions. This was evident in the first of these questions (on whether women can teach men in public), as discussed above; it is even more true of the second, the longest and most challenging of the set, and from which our Lollard dissolution of gender-difference—on the grounds that the souls of men and women “are of the same particular species”—was quoted at the beginning of the present chapter-section (cf. p. 211 above).²⁴⁷ Despite this apparent capaciousness, however, Brut himself is obscured from view, as I now hope to show.

Feminizing Donatism

The question *Utrum mulieres sunt ministri ydonei ad conficiendum eucharistie sacramentum* begins with eight arguments in favor of the proposition that women are suitable ministers to confect the Eucharist, beginning with the citation of I Peter 2:9, “You are a chosen people (*genus electum*), a royal priesthood, a holy nation.”²⁴⁸ Every “elect” or chosen woman is holy; therefore, every such woman is a priest, and so she can confect the Eucharist. I suspect that Brut's opponent has taken this argument, including the relevant application of I Peter 2:9, from chapter 11 of Wyclif's *De potestate pape*, which he seems to know very well. His second initial argument explores the relationship between baptism and the other sacraments. A layman or woman can baptize *in necessitate*—in an emergency situation, as when a child is on the brink of death. But, as Peter Lombard makes clear in his *Sentences* (IV, dist. vi), the power to baptize belongs to priests by dint of their priestly office. Therefore, on the same argument women can confect the Eucharist in the case of necessity. Here our anonymous theologian is keeping close to Brut's doctrine as quoted above from his third excursus, even down to the telling emphasis on the *casus necessitatis*. However, the third argument goes beyond anything in Trefnant's register, by offering a quite extraordinary interpretation of Exodus 12:3, “let every man take a lamb by their families and houses.” A figurative expression should correspond to the truth: that is to say, its details should conform to significant specifics of the dogma which it is believed to express. Now, in Exodus we read of how a lamb is sacrificed within one's own house. This is a figure of the true and immaculate Lamb of God, and so it too should be sacrificed *in domo propria*. Since lay men and women rule their own house, it is appropriate that they should perform this sacrifice.

The subsequent arguments include the proposition (redolent of Wycliffite theory of dominion) that a good lay-man or woman is of greater worth than a bad priest. Given that confection of the body of

the Lord is the most worthy task possible, the good layman or woman is more suitable for its administration than an evil priest. The Holy Spirit operates more abundantly through those in whom it is present. Given that it is present in good layfolk but not in wicked priests, it follows that those good layfolk make the better ministers. Then there is the telling testimony of St. Anselm: “Christ by Himself gives the power of confecting, and not to all, but solely to the apostles and their successors in life, knowledge and power.” It follows that those who are deficient in life cannot confect—a blatantly Donatist proposition. This excursus proceeds to argue that power, as ordained by God, extends throughout the Church and by the Church to its individual members. But the evil are not true members of the Church, and therefore that power does not extend to them. In nature a severed member lacks the agency of the body, being nothing other than a rotten limb.²⁴⁹ The evil are rotten members cut off from the Church. Given that the consecration of the body of Christ is the most sublime act possible, there is no way in which wicked people may have that power. It would seem that Brut’s opponent is determined to draw his adversary deeper and deeper into Donatism. And this doctrine appears to have major implications for female ministry. If wicked people lack the power of consecration then surely good people possess that power—and so, if a woman may have goodness of life and may be ordained, why cannot she consecrate? After all, in canon law we discover that in the ancient church female presbyters and priests existed. Thus it appears that women have been ordained—add that to the obvious fact that women can achieve goodness of life, and sufficient requirements for the capability to consecrate would seem to have been met.

A flurry of quotations from canon law follows, by way of refutation of all those troubling arguments. Only a properly ordained priest can confect the Eucharist, and those female presbyters do not seem to have enjoyed such status. The power of confecting is dependent on priestly office. And, besides, had Christ wished women to administer the Eucharist he would have given his mother the power of binding and loosing.²⁵⁰ A *prima conclusio* goes to the heart of the matter by arguing that moral goodness is not the basis of priestly authority, and conversely the lack thereof does not destroy that authority.²⁵¹ No matter how morally virtuous a layman or woman may be, this does not give him or her the right to confect the body of Christ. Personal virtue is not the power requisite for confecting; the good and the bad minister perform sacramental acts to equal effect. *Nichil a bono magis, nichil a malo minus* . . . nothing greater is done by a good priest, nothing less is done by a bad priest.²⁵² Augustine is credited with this *auctoritas*,²⁵³ and the fact that it is quoted by St. Thomas Aquinas is also noted. Its reception history is far more extensive than that, of

course: it was cited by Peter Lombard in defense of the Eucharist confected by the evil minister and reiterated by successive generations of *Sentences* commentators.²⁵⁴ Little wonder the dictum was so popular, since it encapsulates the key argument against Donatist rejection of an unworthy priest's sacraments.²⁵⁵ And Walter Brut himself had quoted it, as our summary of the relevant part of his trial testimony has indicated (cf. pp. 224–25 above). But, rather than rejecting it, Brut had accepted it. In his own account the question of the priest's personal righteousness is not at issue. What Brut is saying is that the bread is consecrated through Christ's power, and that power is vested in the actual words used by Christ at the Last Supper and passed down to us. Whoever actually says those words, therefore, is relatively important. But if God is willing to effect the consecration when they are said by an evil priest, why should he not do so if they are uttered by a holy woman? If my interpretation of Brut's statement is correct, it is wrong to impute Donatism to him at this point; what Brut says may be heretical, but it is not Donatistic, and therefore the classic anti-Donatist arguments are rather beside the point.

However, Brut's opponent has his own axe to grind. He conjures up the chaos which Donatist doctrine would produce through an explication of Ecclesiastes 9:1, "There are just men and wise men, and their works are in the hand of God: and yet man knoweth not whether he be worthy of love, or hatred."²⁵⁶ If one cannot tell whether a man is worthy of love or hatred, and if the power of consecration were dependent on the goodness which comes from virtue, then one wouldn't know if a particular Eucharist was the genuine article or not. If it was not, then the priest would sin in elevating the host so that it could be revered, and the congregation also would sin in thus revering it. Confidence in the sacrament would be undermined utterly.

This, the second of the Harley *quaestiones*, then focuses on the Donatist principles which it had associated with (perhaps even thrust upon) Walter Brut, to grant them fuller definition. The evident (though unacknowledged) source for the first three points it makes is Thomas Aquinas's *quaestio*, "Whether the sacraments can be conferred by evil ministers?"²⁵⁷ (Here is clear support for the hypothesis that Trefnant's theologians were expanding and developing the ideas which Brut himself held.) First, it is said that the sacraments are ordained for the purpose of cleansing from sin and for the bestowal of grace. But evil men, being themselves unclean, cannot cleanse others from sin, according to Ecclesiasticus 34:4, "What can be made clean by the unclean?" This is confirmed by the fact that a person cannot give what he does not have; someone who lacks grace cannot confer it on another.²⁵⁸ Furthermore, all the virtue of the sacraments derives from Christ, the head of the Church, but evil men are excluded from

this community because they lack charity, by which the members of the Church are united (cf. I John 4:16, “he that abideth in charity abideth in God”).²⁵⁹ And we read in Leviticus 21:17–18 that “whosoever of thy seed throughout their families, hath a blemish, he shall not offer bread to his God. Neither shall he approach to minister to him.”²⁶⁰ Then again, the devil is more powerful than any of his members; if he cannot confect then neither can the evil minister, who is one of his members. A decaying member does not convey life and sense to the other members of its body, but rather corrupts them; a similar effect occurs within the church if the dispensers of the sacraments dry up and decay. God directed his ministers by spiritual signs and called them to witness by signs and portents and distributions of the Holy Spirit according to his own will (cf. Hebrews 2:4 and the very end of Matthew’s gospel); such direction must not be infringed. Finally, Malachi 2:2 is quoted (“I will curse your blessings”), an *auctoritas* which was given prominence by Peter Lombard in his denial of the *potestas conficiendi* to priests who fell into heresy or were excommunicated.²⁶¹

The very formulation of these problems, and the answers provided, generally stay within the parameters established by those major thirteenth-century schoolmen (including Albert the Great, Aquinas, Bonaventure, and Peter of Tarantasia) who, as has been explained in Chapter 1 above, defended vigorously the validity of sacraments dispensed by deviant ministers, their solutions generally being in line with those offered in Augustine’s anti-Donatist writings. Aquinas’s formulation of the first three issues having been followed closely, our anonymous theologian proceeds to offer at least part of the angelic doctor’s response to them, though here he seems to be striking out on his own. Ministers of the Church do not, by their own power, cleanse from sin those who approach the sacraments, nor do they confer grace on them. The power involved here is Christ’s, who acts through them as mere instruments.²⁶² However, it is true to say that an evil man does not confer grace by his personal authority (*auctoritate propria*). Similarly, doctrine relates to its *doctor* more fully than does baptism to the person baptizing or the Eucharist to the priest who confects it. And yet, the evil teacher may give good and sane doctrine, as Matthew 23 attests. All the more reason, then, to believe that an evil priest may perform the office of baptism or the consecration of the Eucharist, to hold that the seed planted in the earth will grow whether it was put there by a good or evil sower. In responding to the argument that no one can give what he does not have, a distinction must be made between two kinds of agency, namely principal and instrumental. The former has formative power while the latter has not, and only this lesser agency is involved in the administration of the

sacraments which has been delegated by the principal agent.

Returning to the metaphor of the decaying body part, Brut's opponent remarks that certain members receive sense and motion from their fellow-members while others (such as bones) receive motion but not sense. In a similar way evil ministers function within the mystical body, in which exists sufficient strength (*robur potestatis*) to sustain the whole even though not all of it receives the "sense" of grace.²⁶³ By charity the (mystical) members of Christ's body are united to its head, so they receive life from it, whereas "He that loveth not abideth in death" (I John 3:14). It is possible for a man to work with a lifeless instrument, which is separated from him as far as bodily union is concerned, provided it is joined to him by some sort of motion. For a workman (*artifex*) works in one way with his hand, and in another way with his axe. In such a manner Christ works in the sacraments, both by wicked men as lifeless instruments (like the axe) and by good men as living instruments (like the hand).²⁶⁴

What, then, of the claim made in Leviticus 21:17–18 that anyone who is blemished "shall not offer bread to his God"? It is instantly conceded that ministers of the New Law should be as pure as those of the Old. Unfortunately Brut's opponent does not elaborate on this, but he may have had in mind Aquinas's solution to the problem (although he does not reproduce it here). Aquinas had said that, in terms of fitness and suitability, good ministers are required for a sacrament (while emphasizing that such personal goodness is not necessary for its execution).²⁶⁵ Our anonymous theologian is quite clear on the proposition that, although a priest may be deemed a member of the devil in respect of his personal merit (or rather the lack thereof), yet he may remain a member of the Church in respect of sacramental office. Then he brings the argument back to the issue of corporeal agency, noting that there are two types thereof, the internal and the external. The former involves what it is like to feel or drink, and dead members do not participate in such activity, just as evil men do not act virtuously. The latter occurs when a dead member or instrument is moved by some external force, as when someone uses a tool to beat or strike with. This tool is connected to a body inasmuch as the person using it gives it motion, but it is not connected to a body in the way in which a limb is. Here, then, is a means of accounting for the manner in which Christ makes use of evil ministers within his mystical body. Such people are tolerated within the Church;²⁶⁶ we are dealing with a matter of official status rather than of individual moral suitability for the job. And finally, those "blessings" which are threatened with the divine curse at Malachi 2:2 are not in fact sacraments. St. Albert the Great had solved that problem in exactly the same way.²⁶⁷

By these means, our orthodox theologian counters the profeminist

potential which he found (perhaps to a greater extent than Brut himself had found) in Wycliffite thought concerning dominion, his main strategy being the implication of a version of Donatism²⁶⁸ for which there is little if any evidence in Brut's own account of female ministry; indeed, as we emphasized above, the Lollard had invoked the standard (supposedly Augustinian) *auctoritas* against that very charge. Any crucial connection between individual moral goodness and institutional priestly authority having been severed, the question *Utrum mulieres sunt ministri ydonei ad conficiendum eucharistie sacramentum* can, at long last, return to the issue of whether women in particular may be suitable confectors of the Eucharist. And roundly reject that proposition. The material we have just discussed may therefore be seen as a preliminary undermining of the premises on which the argument for women priests rests; that having been done, the specific argument gets full attention.

Nevertheless, Brut's views—or, more accurately, Brut's views as amplified by Trefnant's consultant—are afforded a remarkable amount of room in the ensuing discussion. The central idea is that priestly authority relates to the soul and not to the body. It is the soul which is marked with the sacerdotal *character*, and since in the soul there is neither male nor female (*sexus non est in anima*) all those corporeal arguments used to exclude women from the *sacerdotium* must be set aside. This radical doctrine is pursued with vigor and no little originality, the doctrine of *potentia absoluta dei* being deployed to great effect—and, intriguingly, in a way which clarifies and improves upon the way in which Wyclif had used the same doctrine in the eleventh chapter of *De potestate pape*. But there is, inevitably, a sting in the tail.

Women Priests and Absolute Power

The opening gambit is that a specific sex is not required for the priesthood. Just because a man can be a priest does not mean that a woman cannot be. In matters of absolute necessity (*necessitate absoluta*), such as baptism, a woman can act as a priest,²⁶⁹ which seems to prove that her female sex is not an impediment. This proposition “does not involve a contradiction”—more on that crucial phrasing in a moment—because a woman's soul partakes of the requisite substance of that power in question (*substantia illius potestatis*), i.e., of the priesthood, because the souls of men and women are of the same particular species, just as their bodies are; men and women are equally members of the human race, and therefore both sexes have the capacity for priestly power (*capax potestatis sacerdotalis*). Therefore, by *potentia sua absoluta* priestly power can be conferred on a woman, Brut's opponent suggests.

This, I believe, is a reference to the absolute power of God,²⁷⁰ already familiar to us from Wyclif's invocation of the concept in his sporadic treatment of women priests in *De potestate pape*, chapter 11. As noted in our discussion of that text, in late-medieval scholasticism the realm of the *potentia absoluta* was understood as comprising all the possibilities open to God, out of which He chose to do certain things. However, there were, and are, other options available (the awesome divine freedom being limited only inasmuch as God cannot do anything which involves a contradiction), and so He could choose to do something which, by present-day standards, would be startling or even shocking.

Now, we know that Trefnant's theologian definitely had the notion of absolute divine power in his mind when he addressed the issue of female ministration of the Eucharist, for he remarks there that *de potencia Dei absoluta* an angel can confect, just as this same sexless creature can, in exceptional cases, "consecrate churches and baptize and confirm and confer extreme unction."²⁷¹ It follows that "no particular sex is required for the priesthood." And on the very next folio it is asserted that *de potencia dei absoluta* women can be priests, the theologian going on to say that it is a quite different matter to assert that a woman gains priestly status from the power given by the words used to confect the body of Christ.²⁷² So, even if our anonymous schoolman did not mean to say, in his comparison of baptism *necessitate absoluta* and confection in exceptional circumstances, that *de potentia Dei absoluta* a woman can confect, he certainly goes on to say that a little later.

This takes us some distance away from what Walter Brut himself seems to have said, at least according to Trefnant's register. As already noted, in the third excursus the Lollard had remarked that the power of Christ is not circumscribed by the rules of the Roman pope; indeed, His omnipotence cannot be limited by any finite power. Brut's scholastic adversary seems to have translated this notion into the more technical discourse of *potentia absoluta* versus *potentia ordinata*. Whatever the origin of this discourse in the *quaestio* on female confection, whether it came from the fertile imagination of Walter Brut or from the trained minds of the theologians who were appointed to oppose him, it relegates women ministers of the supreme sacrament to the realm of ultimate possibility, putting their sacerdotal agency on a par with other things that God could in theory choose to grant (given that no contradiction is involved) but has shown no sign of granting thus far. William of Ockham's quodlibets offer a wide range of examples of such unlikely divine interventions (as already noted), including making an essence without existence, producing an accident without its subject, destroying the air in a house while conserving its

roof and walls, making water without any qualities at all, and creating a human being without color (cf. p. 213above). Wyclif spoke of a layman being a pope, any person now alive being a limb of the devil, and the Church's clerisy ceasing to exist.²⁷³ Brut's opponent is adding women priests to this array of possible but implausible outcomes. Such a move may sound revolutionary, but in fact there is nothing here to subvert the existing economy of salvation, including the regular ministrations of an exclusively male priesthood who have the prerogative of preaching and administering the sacraments, secure in their hierarchical authority and segregated from even the holiest of layfolk, particularly women, by dint of their *officium* and *magisterium*.

Brut's adversary is not finished with the concept of the *potentia absoluta*. It appears yet again in the *quaestio* under discussion,²⁷⁴ this time in an even more extreme form, in the course of a discussion of the various ways in which something may be said to be possible, viz. logically, politically, legally, and in terms of physics. Logical possibility means that anything can be done which doesn't involve a contradiction. There is no contradiction involved in a woman confecting, and therefore this is possible. But anyone who taught layfolk such doctrine would also, by dint of the same principle, have to teach them that women can contract matrimony with their fathers and their own sons, and that a nun can marry a professed religious—and, furthermore, that women can make the sun and moon, lift up the highest mountain and throw it in the sea, and that any woman can conceive and give birth to God, destroy the world, make the blind see and the mute speak. And anyone who preaches such things deserves to have his tongue cut out! Wyclif himself, we may recall, had remarked that there are many things possible *de potentia Dei absoluta* which it would not be appropriate to mention in sermons (cf. p. 216 above). His orthodox successor displays, yet again, his intimate knowledge of *De potestate pape*, in going far beyond any shocking (but divinely possible) action that Wyclif had thought up. But what point is Bishop Trefnant's supporter trying to make?

There is no suggestion that Walter Brut, "sinner, layman, husbandman and Christian," actually taught any of these weird and wonderful things. The idea is rather that, if he preached in favor of women priests (and we believe he did), then in effect he was appealing to the principle of God's absolute power, and that principle may be used to justify many other sensational, though logically possible, propositions. Today—women priests; tomorrow—women can make the sun and moon! Fanciful exaggerations which have nothing to do with Brut are being used here to discredit and ridicule what he *had* said. The same strategy operates in the question's discussion of political possibility, which here covers everything which

a friend may do to help another by reason of friendship or love. Thanks to the power of her friend and lover, God, a woman can create angels, or a single woman at one and the same time can conceive and give birth to a thousand sons by a thousand men. None of these test cases involves a contradiction—we are back in the world of logical possibility. God can carry out such actions; therefore He can carry them out in response to the invocation of a woman. It follows that a woman who is holy, and whose prayer is thus beloved by God, can confect the Eucharist in terms of political possibility.

The list of logical possibilities provided by Brut's opponent are far more bizarre than anything found in the writings of the *venerabilis inceptor*, the great William of Ockham himself; in their light a colorless human being or water without qualities seem quite tame. Indeed they could be seen as a vulgarization of the doctrine of *potentia absoluta*. Perhaps what we are hearing here is donnish "high table" humor of a kind common in exclusively male intellectual communities.²⁷⁵ The *absoluta/ordinata* distinction (it may be speculated) afforded many opportunities for competitive exaggeration which was checked only by the necessity of avoiding a contradiction—and that seems to have given the professionals plenty of rope. The more outrageous the logical possibility, the louder the laughter. And perhaps such playful philosophizing lies behind the orthodox theologian's use of the dialectic of the *potentia absoluta* as a powerful instrument of ridicule. But a serious point is being made. Extraordinary events can happen, given all the possibilities open to God. However, an implausibly large number of them (and all of the same kind) would be needed to create a viable body of women priests. In short, women can confect the Eucharist—just as pigs might fly.

How much of this would Brut himself have understood? I wonder. He was highly knowledgeable about many theological matters (his eucharistic insight being particularly impressive),²⁷⁶ but the power distinction may not have been one of them. Its effectiveness as a weapon against him leads one to suspect that it came from the arsenal of Trefnant's team of skilled theologians (who may have got the idea from Wyclif's *De potestate pape*), rather than being one of the Lollard's own weapons which subsequently was turned against its owner. Brut had spoken of the many miracles that Christ performed for women at their request, in order to make the point that His omnipotence is not limited by papal dictat (cf. p. 225 above). That seems to have provided his opponents with a major opening. At any rate, it is indubitable that Lollards were not in the habit of appealing to the *potentia absoluta*.²⁷⁷

And neither were they advocates of the doctrine of metempsychosis. One of the biggest surprises of the second of the Harley *quaestiones* is the point at which, in the words of C. W. Marx, Brut “suddenly turns Pythagorean.”²⁷⁸ However, given that there is nothing in Trefnant’s notarized record of Brut’s own words which parallels this crucial passage, and given the utter lack of precedent in the writings of other Lollards, some doubt must remain concerning who is doing the turning, whether Brut himself or an orthodox *agent provocateur*.²⁷⁹

Whatever its origins, the point of the Pythagorean argument is that the priestly *character* is stamped on the soul rather than on the body. After death the soul of a woman might be united to the soul of a man, and if this man took holy orders then that soul would thereby receive the priestly *character*. That would prove that the soul in question was capable of receiving the *character*—and therefore it could have received the *character* while it was joined to the woman’s body. By the same token, the soul of a dead priest could be united with the body of a woman, in which case it would follow that this woman was a priest or at least that her soul bore the priestly *character*. Furthermore, one sex may be changed into another. In his *De animalibus* Albert the Great speaks of how a certain young woman, on reaching the age of puberty, felt an itching in her genitals, and (through the skill of doctors) a penis came forth; subsequently this person married a woman and procreated many children.²⁸⁰ All the more reason, then, to assert that an individual’s sex and the priestly *character* are just not on the same plane (*non opposita ergo stant simul in eodem*); sex is of the body whereas the *character* directly affects the soul. The conclusion drawn is that no corporeal disposition is incompatible with the priestly *character*, and therefore gender is no impediment to ordination.

These arguments are, of course, vigorously refuted by the defender of orthodoxy, who emphasizes that there is a natural appropriateness (*conveniencia naturalis*) between the masculine body and the masculine soul on the one hand, and the female body and the female soul on the other, which stems from the moment of the first individuation of those souls, their affinity in creation and infusion into bodies. It is impossible for a male soul to enform the body of a woman or a female soul to enform the body of a man, due to a natural incompatibility or repugnance; men and women may belong to the same species, but defining differences remain. Hence, any body-swapping of the kind just proposed would be impossible. This argument is reminiscent of a type used in justification of the belief that at the resurrection the souls of women are reunited with their female bodies rather than being joined to male ones (as one might expect, given that the male body is the more perfect).²⁸¹ For a person to be whole, his or her soul must be

reunited with its own body. While on the one hand late-medieval theology urged the transcendence of body by soul, on the other it held that the material body was “necessary both for personhood and for eternal bliss,” as Caroline Walker Bynum says in discussing a sermon of St. Bonaventure’s which holds that the Virgin Mary’s bodily assumption into heaven ensured her perfect joy—this being in contrast with the condition of the saints whose minds, although enjoying the pleasures of heaven, were nevertheless hindered by “their natural inclination for their bodies,” a longing which could be satisfied only at the resurrection.²⁸² “We will rise perfect and beautiful, but particular as well,” and a crucial aspect of that particularity is the reunion with one’s own material body; no one else’s can ensure that perfect happiness which is a crucial feature of our future risen existence.²⁸³ Such thinking underlies our anonymous theologian’s declaration that male souls do not suit female bodies, and vice versa. He adds that the soul of a man, with all its natural dispositions, properties, and defining characteristics, is different from the soul of any woman, and it is capable of receiving the priestly *character* in a way in which no woman’s soul can, notwithstanding the fact that both sexes are members of one and the same species. It would seem that, although *sexus non est in anima*, there are crucial relationships between sex and soul which cannot be overridden.

So much, then, for the question’s Pythagorean moment. Its relationship to the thought of Walter Brut in particular and Lollardy in general is unclear, certainly unproved. Add that to the orthodox theologian’s extensive deployment of the notion of logical possibility, which has the most tenuous of connections to Brut’s statements as recorded in Trefnant’s register, and indeed to the way in which material from Thomas Aquinas was used (without acknowledgment) to help weave a web of Donatist doctrine which the *quaestio* tears down, and we may feel prepared to question any direct relationship between Brut’s own ideas and what Trefnant’s team made of them in their *quaestiones*. Of course, as Anne Hudson has wisely warned, it is perfectly possible that Brut’s opponents had more material from their adversary than we have access to nowadays, and both she and Margaret Aston have seen the dossier in Trefnant’s register as disorganized and incomplete (or at least as being far from comprehensive).²⁸⁴ However, these eminently plausible arguments still leave room for the suggestion that Brut’s opponents made their victim’s views the occasion for a debate on women priests which contained much of their own casuistry, and which upped the intellectual ante of the discussion.

It is particularly significant, I think, that when “Walterus Bryth” is quoted by name in the second of the Harley *quaestiones*²⁸⁵ the views

attributed to him remain very close to those recorded in the register. It could be inferred, then, that when he is not thus named, his opponents feel free to go wider afield. Could such (putative) imaginative enlargement be seen as the product of a relatively tolerant period of reasoned opposition to Wycliffite views, as also evidenced by the 1401 Oxford debate on Bible translation, a far cry from the repressive era characterized by the infamous *Constitutions* of Archbishop Arundel? I doubt it. The *quaestiones* recorded in Harley 31 were indubitably prompted by the Brut trial and hence had a significance—or at least a potential significance—which extended far beyond academic point-scoring within the privileged and protected milieu of the schools.²⁸⁶ They had a public function, akin to the identification and refutation of the heretical views of Wyclif, Repington, and Hereford in 1382. (And it should be recalled that 1401, the year of the Oxford debate on Bible translation, also saw the enactment of the statute *De heretico comburendo* and the execution of William Sawtry.) Perhaps Trefnant's team of theologians pushed certain crucial principles of Brut's Lollard theology to extremes of which the Welshman himself was innocent, thereby coming up with propositions which might have surprised the figure who had occasioned them. But this can hardly be mistaken for intellectual disinterestedness or tacit collusion. Trefnant's hit squad was faced with highly dangerous views, which could spread like wildfire. Brut was preaching to all and sundry, and had done so for many years; his doctrines had to be understood in all their ramifications, the better to critique and condemn them. The motivation and purpose of the questions' extensive *amplificatio* of Brut's ideas was thoroughgoing refutation. What we are dealing with, then, are transactions of polemic, the metempsychosis of ideas from one body of thought to another, which ultimately rejects them.

Little did Trefnant's theologians know that not all the views associated with Brut were to become staples of later Lollard thought, that in certain cases they were anticipating problems which history would consign to a cul-de-sac rather than to the broad primrose path of heresy. The notion that women can administer the sacraments attracted few advocates and received little theological justification. It never became one of the major distinguishing characteristics of demotic Wycliffism; neither does it seem to have enjoyed a wide circulation *in vulgari*, to judge from the not inconsiderable corpus of surviving Middle English Lollard texts. It is particularly telling, I think, that when Walter Brut appears in *Pierce the Ploughmans Crede* (ll. 657–63, quoted at the beginning of this chapter) there is no mention of his views about female ministry. But some notions concerning “women priests” did indeed make it into the vernacular, to judge from the

Norwich trial records relating to (for example) Hawisia Moone, who held that “every man and every woman being in good lyf oute of synne is as good prest and hath [as] muche poar of God in al thynges as any prest ordred, be he pope or bisshop.”²⁸⁷ Ten of Hawisia’s fellow-heretics were credited with similar views.²⁸⁸ It seems reasonable to assume that they were following the teachings of the charismatic preacher William White, whose heretical views included the belief that “quilibet fidelis in Christo Jesu est sacerdos electae ecclesiae Dei.”²⁸⁹

But this scarcely supports the hypothesis that Lollard women actually performed priestly functions. True, they are records which indicate that they proselytized alongside their menfolk, but this is far from proving the existence of “a nascent counter-church” (as Margaret Aston puts it) with laymen and women presuming to administer the sacraments.²⁹⁰ A few “horror stories” have come down to us, such as Roger Dymmok’s claim that in heretical conventicles at Oxford and London certain “women (whom they call virgins, but in fact [are] their whores) have, I cannot say celebrated, but rather profaned masses.”²⁹¹ And Thomas Netter reported with horror how, “in the city of London the most foolish of women, set up on stools, publicly read and taught the Scriptures in a congregation of men.”²⁹² However, such claims are few and far between. “The fact that we hear so little, even polemically” regarding actual incidents, avers Aston, “suggests the extreme rarity of such proceedings as illicit ordinations or bowdlerised masses, conducted by male or female celebrants.”²⁹³ Besides, it would be utterly naïve to credit Lollardy with exceptionally enlightened views on the capabilities of women.²⁹⁴ Shannon McSheffrey’s research has made abundantly clear that Lollard women played their part in the movement largely within the private, domestic sphere and in association with their husbands; the heresy afforded them few opportunities for public preaching and teaching.²⁹⁵ There seems no reason to question Aston’s conclusion that as far as “Lollard women priests” are concerned, what we are dealing with is no more substantial than “plausible gossip”—while accepting that “gossip is also part of history.”²⁹⁶

I believe that some of that gossip reached the ears of that great seeker after *tydynges*, Geoffrey Chaucer. His Bible-quoting, argument-toting Wife of Bath, the subject of the following chapter, was a highly topical construct. The *theory* concerning female preachers and priests had great potency and challenge even if it was rarely put into practice, and even if orthodox theologians had more to say on the subject than had the heretics themselves. Women priests may not have existed, but fear of them certainly did. In this regard, the frequency with which Margery Kempe was accused of being a “Loller” and “heretyke” is

highly significant.²⁹⁷ Just a few years after Chaucer's death, those were the obvious (insulting) labels for a woman who wandered the countryside, apparently free of male authority, regaling all and sundry with homilies and Bible stories.²⁹⁸ Whatever the social and theological realities, a popular myth seems to have existed, to which Margery—in the eyes of her beholders—conformed. And Margery herself knew the score. When St. Paul's prohibition of female preaching was quoted at her during an interrogation by Archbishop Bowet of York, she carefully replied that she did not "come" in any "pulpytt" but used only "comownycacyon [conversation] and good wordys."²⁹⁹ We may recall Aquinas's contrast between public teaching in Church and private teaching, when one person familiarly converses with a few others (*familiariter colloquendo*), or Netter's explanation of how the Virgin Mary taught the Apostles not *ex officio et auctoritate* but *amicabiliter*, just as a friend teaches a friend. In this matter at least, Margery Kempe seems to have been willing and able to say the right thing, or at least what a dangerous occasion demanded.

One certainly did not have to be a "Loller" (however constructed) to recognize that

it is an impossible
That any clerk wol speke good of wyves,
But if it be of hooly seintes lyves,
Ne of noon oother womman never the mo.
(*Wife of Bath's Tale*, III(D), 688–91)

The miraculous or at least exceptional achievements of the saints benefited ordinary women little if at all. As a Vadstena sermon in praise of St. Bridget remarked,³⁰⁰ and as this chapter has demonstrated again and again, "the privileges of a few [women] do not constitute common law." It is highly appropriate that the words quoted above were bestowed by Chaucer on the Wife of Bath, Middle English literature's most challenging embodiment of that common law, a figure who revels in "her" own materiality and too sullied (or solid) flesh. Eustace of Arras had claimed that St. Paul's prohibition of female teachers applied specifically to married women, who represent the sex's "common state." In other words, in marriage a woman fulfils society's normal expectations concerning her natural capabilities and biological destiny. Chaucer's Wife of Bath is happy to accept that *officium mulieris*, to eschew virginity and bestow the "flour" of all her "age / In the actes and in fruyt of mariage" (III(D) 113–14). And yet—from this inferior subject-position she manages to offer genuinely impressive instruction which centers on the nature of true nobility, this coming from the mouth of an old woman who thereby exercises pedagogic dominion over the immoral man who is her reluctant pupil.

But how far does the Wife of Bath rise above and beyond those

misogynistic discourses relating to the shrewish woman, the pathetic *vetula*, and the crone whose expertise relates solely to the art of love, which are her *fons et origo*? Can a *magistra amoris* really become a *doctrix* of impeccable moral doctrine? If the Pardoner could achieve the male equivalent of this (or at least claim he could), why not the Wife—or is the impediment of sex an insuperable barrier, yet again? Can she in some sense be termed a “noble prechour”? This is to ask, is there any truth in the Pardoner’s jest to that effect—or indeed any danger, given the fact that Chaucer was writing at a time when at least some orthodox churchmen were reacting vigorously to the threat (real or imagined) posed by “Lollard women priests”? All these questions will be addressed in the following chapter.

Gender as Fallibility

Chaucer's Wife of Bath and the Impediment of Sex

The Pardoner and the Wife of Bath are constructed very differently as fallible authors and usurpers of the office of preacher. My contention is that the sources of at least some of those differences may be sought in the sharply contrasting views which late-medieval theologians held concerning immorality as fallibility (in a male authority-figure) and gender as fallibility (in a female). Scholastic thought supposed that at least some of a preacher's sins, provided they were not manifest to his congregation, did not compromise the efficacy of his preaching. In stark contrast, the female body and its alleged natural attributes made preaching generally impossible, though special circumstances were recognized and there was widespread acceptance of the private instruction by women of children and other women. The immoral preacher or the *mercenarius* was to be tolerated: the female preacher was not. It might well be concluded that it was better to be a secret sinner than a woman. Irrespective of a woman's good intention, impeccable moral *habitus*, or settled state of grace, her body spoke louder than her words. And she was quite unable to alter the situation. Being caught in possession of a woman's body, so to speak, was an offense in itself, carrying the penalty of a life-sentence. Men of *gret auctorite* were in a quite different position. Their relevant *conditiones* and circumstances were usually capable of change. A vicious priest could, through exercise of the virtues, control his passions and reform himself in Christ. Immorality was a curable condition. But being a woman was not. Then again, youthfulness barred a man from the priesthood; however, with time and maturity he could become a suitable recipient of holy orders. Age was a temporary impediment. But a woman's sex was a permanent bar—and age certainly *could* wither her and custom stale her infinite variety, to judge from the commonplace denigration of the *vetula*. Here, then, gender itself assigned in self-fulfilling prophecy the constituents of “deuiacion,” making fallibility and failure inevitable.

This chapter will attempt to recuperate the *impedimentum sexus*, as debated by orthodox and heterodox medieval theologians, as a suitable cultural context within which the Wife of Bath's humorous but highly unsettling authority-claim may be interpreted. I shall review the main literary tradition from which the Wife of Bath sprang

(most obviously represented by Jean de Meun's *La Vieille*), arguing that here female knowledge and authority is carefully controlled and delimited, affirmative of stereotypical medieval views of female sexuality and to that extent normative, even predictable. The wish to titillate is certainly present in that tradition, perhaps also the desire to shock, and maybe it can even manage a brief *frisson* of social subversion. But Alisoun's discourses of authority are far more ambitious and complicated, her challenge demanding to the point of being dangerous, particularly in view of the milieu in which Chaucer was writing. For, as the previous chapter has demonstrated, in the England of the 1390s some of Wyclif's followers had undermined many of the verities concerning the denial of public office to women, including the standard strategies for barring women from the *officium praedicatoris* and the conservative interpretation of the tenet that *sexus non est in anima*. It is, of course, impossible to determine whether Chaucer had even heard of either Walter Brut or John Purvey, or had talked to any of the "Lollard Knights" about the possibility of women priests. But the *Wife of Bath's Prologue and Tale*, very much a product of the 1390s, certainly does display some knowledge of the issues involved. The Friar's discomfiture (as expressed in the passage quoted at the beginning of this chapter) is proof-positive of that.

But Alisoun of Bath is no Lollard. And even the claim that "Chaucer wished to gain a hearing for Lollard views via the Wife" (which carries the implication that, whatever his own views may have been, the poet was *de facto* some sort of Lollard proselytizer),¹ runs the risk of reading the text against its very grain. However, sometimes Alisoun speaks and acts in a way which in Chaucer's day could well have aroused suspicion; one may recall (yet again) the frequency with which, a few decades later, Margery Kempe was branded as a "fals Lollare,"² despite the fact that, when necessary, she could prove her orthodoxy with aplomb and all the essential information. Of course, Margery was living at a time when heresy-hunting had intensified and the frontiers of orthodox were being policed more rigorously. Reginald Pecock's *Repressor of Over Much Blaming of the Clergy* is a product of that same later period; however, his diatribe against women who make themselves "so wise bi the Bible" that they take issue with "mannis vertuose conuersacioun" inevitably brings the Wife of Bath to mind.³ Pecock proceeds to complain that such women "ben ful coppid of speche anentis clerkis, and avaunten and profren hem silf whanne thei ben in her iolite and in her owne housis forto argue and dispute a 3ens clerkis." They sound like Alisoun's daughters. But there are crucial differences. The Wife of Bath has received her intellectual (as well as some of her amatory) schooling not in some Lollard classroom or conventicle⁴ but from her last husband, named Jankyn, an Oxford-

trained “clerk” (III(D) 527–28) who read aloud to her (translating into English in the process, of course) from his anthology of antifeminist texts.⁵ It could be said, then, that she has learned at home, from her husband—how acquiescent and submissive can one get? But *what* Alisoun has learned hardly promotes compliance with the social norms and niceties, for it allows her access to information and methods of analysis which were the privileged currency of the “scoles of clergie.” In that sense, then, she was an *auditrix* of theology and philosophy to an extent far beyond what Henry of Ghent deemed appropriate for the common herd, those uncontentious sermons which taught the *vulgus* all they needed to know for their salvation. Alisoun has, of course, availed herself of this and other officially sanctioned methods of lay teaching—

“I made my visitaciouns
To vigiles and to processiouns,
To prechyng eek, and to thise pilgrimages,
To pleyes of myracles, and to mariages. . .” (III(D) 555–58)

—but, thanks to Jankyn, she is in possession of more élite and powerful knowledge. Needless to say, Jankyn did not put on a course of Bible-study for his wife. But when his misogynistic *auctores* quoted Scripture to suit themselves, she inevitably was exposed to the procedures of biblical hermeneutics. In particular, Jerome’s *Adversus Jovinianum* (identified as part of Jankyn’s book at III(D) 673–75) was a great help. This has rightly been described as “a marvelous *tour de force* of scriptural exegesis”; indeed, John Oppel has gone so far as to call it “a reading . . . of the whole biblical tradition.”⁶ (Chaucer’s interest is, however, limited to the first book of this treatise, wherein Jerome had sought to refute Jovinian’s view that virgins and wives are equal in the sight of God.) Thus Chaucer accounts for the Wife of Bath’s learning and scholastic skill. Not all of her information could possibly have come from Jankyn’s book, of course; the poet is not that precise or pedantic. The important thing to recognize is that Chaucer made a major gesture toward verisimilitude—and this may well have been done for reasons which went beyond those of literary decorum.

Furthermore, I contend that the crucial sources for Chaucer’s doctrine of sovereignty are not Lollard treatises on dominion but texts of a very different order: Jean de Meun’s part of the *Roman de la Rose* and Dante’s *Convivio*, which Chaucer brought into ingenious interaction with a standard romance about a spellbound “loathly damsel” and an exemplary knight (which he proceeded to turn upside-down). Even more fundamentally (given the major critical consensus on this point at least), the Wife of Bath’s major “theme” is marriage. And that is a subject about which Lollards had relatively little to say. My own attempt to seek out a theology of marriage amidst the tangled

web of demotic Wycliffism has suffered from a paucity of material, along with the difficulty of understanding the significance of some of the points which actually do get made, due to the lack of a full intellectual framework of the kind which Lollardy provided for its statements on so many of the other sacraments. Had Chaucer's main objective in constructing the Wife of Bath really been "to gain a hearing for Lollard views," surely he would have chosen views which were more fully developed? Furthermore, while I am in no doubt that her opinions on, for example, sexual generosity and pleasure within marriage, and her presentation of the power-game between a rapist-knight and a wise old woman, *are* radical, this radicalism is of a type which is unparalleled within Lollard radical thinking. Yet, in its own way, Alisoun's doctrine of marriage is potentially as subversive of the established social order as anything which John Wyclif, John Purvey, or William White had to say on this vexed subject—I say "potentially" because there is always the risk of misogynistic tradition ensuring that her views will be laughed out of court. Here, then, Chaucer provides a means of containing and neutralizing highly sensitive issues in the very process of giving them voice, thereby implicating a useful defense for a risk-taking poet. The matter can be read both ways, and Chaucer himself may have wanted to play it both ways.

Chaucer took from Ovid's *Amores* and Jean de Meun's *Rose* the figure of the *magistra amoris*⁷ and transformed her (with some help from the first book of Jerome's *Adversus Jovinianum*, in blatant violation of the *auctor's* own intention) into an archwife and an authority on marriage. Yet the process went even further than that. Given the wide range of subjects on which Dame Alisoun can pronounce, the fact that she is capable of going beyond her mock-*magisterium* to exercise an extensive, and quite un-ironic, moral authority, it may be suggested that (on some occasions at least) she is reminiscent of those creatures of the schoolmen's nightmares, the *auditrix*, *doctrix*, and *praedicatrix*. For Bonaventure, Aquinas, and their successors those were impossible (or at best exceptional) shes. For some Lollards they *could* exist—at least in the mind; whether they actually lived in the real world is another matter. But the threat does seem to have passed into the popular imagination (as I have suggested at the end of the previous chapter). Otherwise Chaucer's Friar would not have been so troubled.

In the *Wife of Bath's Prologue and Tale* the monster or the marvel—depending on how one wants to view her—comes alive, takes on flesh. An abundance of flesh. And yet in a way which images the stark oppositions between the weak, desiring, and desired body and the noble, transcendent soul as never before.

I. ALISOUN AMONG THE AUCTORITEES

Chaucer made some attempt to place the Wife of Bath within a specific socioeconomic context, sporadically identifying her as a rural clothier and landowner, representative of the emergent wealthy bourgeoisie. On occasion Alisoun “herself ” seems mindful of her social status—hence, for example, her anger when someone gets ahead of her at the “offrynge” during Mass (I(A) 449–52). These features have long been recognized within Chaucer’s reception-history, one early instance being Thomas Warton’s description (in 1774) of the Wife as “a respectable dame” whose “chief pride consists in being a conspicuous and significant character at church on a Sunday.”⁸ Among the recent accounts, D. W. Robertson’s study has proved particularly influential, one of its central tenets being that it is “quite likely” that “most members of the audience would have concluded immediately that the Wife’s prosperity was the result of her participation in the thriving rural cloth industry.”⁹ This position has recently—and rightly, I believe—been challenged by Susan Crane, who finds the secret of Alisoun’s success in her serial widowhood. “Clothmaking is not, in fact, how she lives; rather, she wins money by marrying repeatedly and cajoling, browbeating, or outliving her husbands.”¹⁰ It may be added that the Wife of Bath’s last two choices of husband put at risk all her worldly goods. Her fourth one was a “revelour” or profligate who kept a mistress (III(D) 453),¹¹ and so besotted was Alisoun with her fifth and last husband, Jankyn, that she gave him total control of everything she had gained from her old spouses:

. . .to hym yaf I al the lond and fee
That evere was me yeven therbifoore.
But afterward repented me ful soore;
He nolde suffre nothyng of my list. (630–33)

Hardly the action of a good businesswoman! Here Chaucer’s text raises the specter of the wealthy widow who uses her financial assets to buy a young husband, as exemplified by the hapless heroine of Gautier le Leu’s *La veuve*, a creature obsessed with making love rather than making money.¹² And the Wife’s sentimentalization of her action—the claim that she married Jankyn for love—only serves to highlight what traditional misogyny would regard as typically feminine weakness. More fundamentally, Chaucer’s occasional efforts at making Alisoun of Bath respectable hardly survive the frank account she provides of the great “tribulacion” she has endured in “mariage” (173) and her gleeful defense of female desire.

We should therefore not lose track—as if we could!—of the extent to which the Wife of Bath is a textual creature, a tissue of antifeminist discourses relating to sexually aggressive and shrewish women.

Chaucer's basic model was the literary type of the old woman or *vetula* who teaches the young about love, and who sometimes functions as a bawd, a go-between who brings young lovers together. Her ultimate prototype is Dipsas, who in the first book of Ovid's *Amores* advises a young and beautiful pupil in the arts of sexual exploitation and manipulation of the ardent male. Dipsas had assured her young student that her love-doctrine had been learned by long experience, and so she should pay careful attention to it. "If you fulfill these precepts, learned by me from long experience (*mihi cognita longo*), and wind and breeze carry not my words away, you will often speak me well as long as I live, and often pray my bones lie softly when I am dead" (*Amores*, I.viii, 105–8).¹³ Jean de Meun built on this by having La Vielle look back on her past life and many loves, remarking that she had never gone to a school where they taught the theory of love. "I know everything by practice. . . . Experiments, which I have followed my whole life, have made me wise in love" (*Rose*, 12774–76). Chaucer's version of those sentiments is placed at the very beginning of the Wife's prologue—

Experience, though noon auctoritee
Were in this world, is right ynogh for me . . . (III(D) 1–2)¹⁴

—though she is speaking here of the "wo that is in mariage" rather than the pleasures and pains of love as such (this being part and parcel of Chaucer's reconstruction of Alisoun as more of a *veuve* than a *vielle*—on which, more later). A little later (in at least some manuscripts) Alisoun claims that

Diverse scoles maken parfyt clerkes,
And diverse practyk in many sondry werkes. (46–47a)¹⁵

The basic point here is that practice makes perfect, and the more practice the better; she has been well schooled by her five husbands, and looks forward to the sixth. This couplet is of uncertain textual status, but the language of "scolei yng" is indubitably significant for Chaucer's construction of the Wife of Bath, and features in the Pardoner's response to her. A figure who (vaingloriously) prides himself on his preaching, he compliments the Wife of Bath on being "a noble prechour in this cas" (165), the "cas" being the topic of love and marriage. The Pardoner was about to "wedde a wyf" but now, he declares, she has put him off the idea. And a little later he urges her to continue with her narrative, to "teche us yonge men of your praktike" (184–87). The interpretive challenges presented by those passages in respect of the Pardoner's sexuality has been discussed in Chapter 2 above; our concern here is with the fact that they envisage the Wife of Bath as essentially a teacher of the young in matters of love, in the tradition of La Vielle. Similarly, Justinus in the *Merchant's Tale* praises

her for having “declared” a lot about marriage “ful wel in litel space” (IV(E) 1685–87), and even the first-person narrator of the General Prologue comments on the Wife’s knowledge of the “remedies of love” (I(A) 475–76), thereby alluding to her Ovidian roots. Alisoun’s ancestry is an open book. The depth of her expertise concerning “tribulacioun in mariage” (III(D) 173–74) is impressive—even as the limits of that expertise (or **auctricitas*, if you will)¹⁶ are utterly clear: the Wife of Bath knows about things that women are *supposed* to know about, *allowed* to know about.

In his “Mumming at Hertford” (c. 1430) John Lydgate follows in those particular Chaucerian footsteps by having a group of wives cite in support of their “partye” the “worthy Wyff of Bathe” who can “shewe statutes moo þan six or seven, / Howe wyves make hir housbandes wynne heven” (168–70).¹⁷ John Skelton similarly remarks that Alisoun’s portrayal may give “other wyves” ideas about how “Their husbandes to set at nought” (*Phillip Sparrow*, 626–27; c. 1507).¹⁸ And in the *Dialog with a Friend* which substantially was completed by early 1421, Thomas Hoccleve presents her as an “authoress” (*auctrice*) on the subject of female displeasure at men’s depiction of vicious women:

The Wyf of Bathe take I for auctrice
þat wommen han no ioie ne deyntee
þat men sholde vpon hem putte any vice . . . (694–96)¹⁹

The comparable term *auctrix* appears in the prologue to the *vita* of Beatrice of Nazareth (1200–1268), where its writer emphasizes that he is only the translator of the work whereas Beatrice is the “authoress,” the good name of this Cistercian nun guaranteeing that its narration flows “not from some dark mendacious hiding place, but from the bright shining font of truth.”²⁰ But no such respectful deference underlies Hoccleve’s designation of Alisoun as an *auctrice*. It is even farther away from Thomas Netter’s use of *auctrix* when fulminating against a laywoman (“the daughter of a tanner, in the city of London”) who “in the time of Richard II” had dared publicly to celebrate Masses in English, thereby being an “authoress” or advocate of the “pestilent dogma” in question.²¹ Rather it may be compared with similarly ironic forms like *auditrix* and *doctrix*, as used by Henry of Ghent in what may have been an attempt at wit (cf. Chapter 1 above). In the passages quoted above, the Wife of Bath’s authority is confined to the relatively safe subjects of sex, marriage, and the ways of women—subjects which, far from threatening male superiority, enable men to demonstrate it with misogynistic pronouncements about women’s limited intellectual capacities, sensual obsessions, shrewish aggression, and emotional instability.

But the *Wife of Bath’s Prologue* and *Tale* move far beyond such

predictable parameters, granting her a much wider area of expertise. In the *Prologue* a formidable number of Latin *auctores* are alleged, while in the *Tale* a wise old woman appears who is able to quote Valerius Maximus, Seneca, Boethius, and Juvenal, along with the Bible and “the wise poete of Florence,” Dante. According to Chaucer’s fiction, she has acquired most of her information from her husband Jankyn, who at “scole” in Oxford (III(D) 527–28) was trained in reading, writing, and arguing. Jankyn’s method of instruction, if such it may be called, consisted of reading aloud to her from his antifeminist anthology. Alisoun proves an apt pupil, getting far more out of this unpromising material than her husband could have imagined possible. Academic techniques of “arguing by authority” permeate her long monologue. She pits *auctoritas* against *auctoritas*, seeking to cap one with another; querying whether the authorial intention of an important passage is clear or not; suggesting that certain authoritative statements apply differently in different circumstances and to different types of people. In sum, the Wife of Bath is engaging not just with male authority but with male methods of argument, the techniques of disputation which were the staple method of intellectual inquiry in medieval schools of higher education, from which women were barred.

Take the Wife’s treatment of Jerome’s “book agayn Jovinian” (III(D) 675), for instance, an “antifeminist classic” to which the first hundred lines or so of her *Prologue* are deeply indebted. Jerome viewed marriage as a kind of damage-limitation exercise. It is better to marry than to burn in lust, as St. Paul said (I Corinthians 7:8), and hopefully if a man who is incapable of being chaste gets married his desires will be contained and controlled within that institution. Expounding and elaborating the Apostle’s words, Jerome damns with faint praise far more stridently than he. It is better to know “a single husband” (though he be the second or third in line) “than to have many lovers”—“that is, it is more tolerable for a woman to prostitute herself to one man than to many.”²² On this argument, marriage and whoredom have much in common, and multiple marriage is akin to serial prostitution, despite Jerome’s protestation early in his treatise that he honors marriage, while preferring virginity.²³ If a woman is widowed, then, this should be seen as a blessed release, and certainly she should not consider remarriage, but rather remain in a state of chaste widowhood. Many illustrations from the Bible and classical literature are cited in support of Jerome’s view that multiple marriage is to be avoided and despised, one of his main motives in writing against Jovinian being the excoriation of women who had behaved rather like the Wife of Bath in rushing from one marriage into another.

Alisoun counterattacks with enthusiasm. “Me was toold,” she begins—later it becomes clear that her instructor was Jankyn—that Christ attended just one wedding (cf. John 2:1–2), an “ensample” which Jankyn used to teach her that she “ne scolde wedded be but ones” (III(D) 9–13). This follows Jerome, as does the following “sharp word,” Christ’s reproof of the Samaritan woman (cf. John 4:7–30).²⁴ “Thou hast yhad fyve housbondes,” and the man you now have “is noght thyn housbonde,”²⁵ paraphrases the Wife of Bath, adding disingenuously that what is “mente therby, I kan nat seyn” (13–20). Here she raises a doubt concerning textual intention: but neither the *Glossa ordinaria* nor Nicholas of Lyre’s *Postilla litteralis* is in any doubt about this matter, being quite clear that the Samaritan and her current partner were engaged in an adulterous relationship. (Lyre explains that the woman’s recognition of Christ as a prophet [v. 19] is in direct response to his revelation of her secret, i.e., that currently she is not legally married.) Given the weight of opinion on this matter, Alisoun’s professed ignorance of the meaning of St. John’s words seems suspicious—and could be read as a wish to avoid Christ’s strictures on promiscuity, which (given the Wife’s own extravagant sexuality) make her uncomfortable. However, St. Jerome had read the passage as intimating a more comprehensive denigration of sexual pluralism, even that legalized by serial marriage. Here, he asserts, questions are raised about the number of husbands a woman may properly have. “Where there are more husbands than one the proper idea of a husband, who is a single person, is destroyed,” he declares, adding that “at the beginning” (i.e., in the Genesis account) “one rib was turned into one wife,” and the couple were to “be one flesh—not three, or four. . .”²⁶ Little wonder, then, that Alisoun should profess not to know what John 4:18 meant: she does not want to allow Jerome’s exegesis, which disparages multiple marriage, a hearing.

Expounding and elaborating St. Paul’s comments on marriage in I Corinthians 7, Jerome conceded that the number of wives a man may take is not defined, because, within the Christian Church, following the death of one’s current spouse any subsequent wife is treated as the first.²⁷ This does not mean, asserts Jerome, that Paul actually recommended remarriage when he said that “if her husband die” the widow is “at liberty. Let her marry to whom she will” (I Corinthians 7:39). Rather the Apostle was forced to concede “many things which he did not like” in view of the sad fact of human incontinence.²⁸ *Au contraire*, Alisoun finds in this lack of “diffinicioun” of the “nombre” of husbands a woman may have a license to remarry as often as she wishes (III(D) 23–25, 83–86).

. . . th’apostle seith that I am free
To wedde, a Goddes half, where it liketh me.

He seith that to be wedded is no synne;
Bet is to be wedded than to brynne. (49–52)

St. Paul had indeed said “if thou take a wife, thou hast not sinned” (I Corinthians 7:28, cf. 36), and that it is better to marry than to burn (I Corinthians 7:8). But here he was thinking in terms of a major concession to human frailty: “But I speak this by indulgence (*indulgentia*), not by commandment” (I Corinthians 7:6). The term *indulgentia* has a far more negative, indeed grudging, connotation here than in the Wife of Bath’s reformulation.

... for to been a wyf he [i.e., St. Paul] yaf me leve
Of indulgence; so nys it no reprove
To wedde me. . . (III(D) 83–85)

Paul makes it abundantly clear that he is describing only those who cannot practice sufficient sexual self-control; he would prefer people to be as he is, i.e., a “mayde,” as Alisoun puts it (79). But her emphasis falls rather on the point that, since the Apostle recognized that everyone was not like him, he only *advised* people to be virgins or at least continent. And mere “conseillyng is no comandement” (67), she declares gleefully, translating I Corinthians 7:6 to suit herself. In sharp contrast, Jerome had stressed the comparative element in St. Paul’s words, the idea being that marriage and remarriage are inferior options. “The reason why it is better to marry is that it is worse to burn,” but if “burning lust be absent” it is certainly not better to marry.²⁹ A man does not sin if he marries a wife, “yet he does not do well if he marry,” asserts Jerome.³⁰ It is as if the Apostle were to say that having one eye is better than being blind, or that it’s better to stand on one foot and use a walking-stick to support the body “than crawl with broken legs.” Marriage therefore is the lesser of two evils, and what Jerome wants “is not a smaller evil, but a thing absolutely good.”³¹ In her turn, the Wife of Bath avoids any such invidious comparisons, presenting virginity and continence as simple opposites to marriage and conceding their higher status while affirming that they are not for her. Rather she will devote her life to “the actes and in fruyt of mariage” (105–14).

“Virginity is to marriage what fruit is to the tree, or grain to the straw,” St. Jerome had declared.³² Are any aspersions cast on the tree and the straw, if we prefer the fruit to root and foliage, or the grain to stalk and ear? The required answer to this question is of course “No,” but the terms of Jerome’s comparisons are loaded ones, given that the fruit is naturally seen as the reason why the tree exists in the first place, ditto the grain in relation to the straw. Marriage, seen as tree and straw, is thereby degraded, reduced to a lowly and lumpen utilitarianism. Alisoun rings the changes by pointing out virginity’s dependence on marriage. If there were no such seed-bed, “virginitee”

would have nowhere to “growe” and therefore, it is implied, could not exist (71–72).

In a similarly structured comparison, Jerome remarks that in order to avoid eating cow dung a person may be allowed to eat barley, but the finest wheat bread (here used to symbolize the perfection of virginity) is better food by far. Marriage, then, stands in the same relation to gross promiscuity as barley does to dung—a juxtaposition which can only serve to demean marriage further. Alisoun rises to the challenge, cleverly avoiding the cow dung and emphasizing the nutritious qualities of barley-bread:

Lat hem be breed of pured whete-seed,
And lat us wyves hoten barley-breed;
And yet with barley-breed, Mark telle kan,
Oure Lord Jhesu refresshed many a man. (III(D) 143–46)

Alisoun’s appropriation of the parable of the loaves and fishes (cf. Mark 8:1–10) is nicely done, and the more one thinks about her point the more telling it seems. Far from despising barley bread, Jesus Christ honored it in a wonderful miracle whereby a multitude of people were fed. But this is to think of the *auctoritee* out of context. After performing the miracle of the loaves and fishes Christ crosses the sea to Capernaum, followed by a multitude. Those people followed, Christ complains, just because they ate their fill of the loaves. But they should work not for the food that perishes, i.e., merely corporeal food, but rather for the food that endures for eternal life, i.e., spiritual food (John 6:26–27; here I have drawn upon the gloss of Nicholas of Lyre).³³ However, Alisoun does not follow the Biblical narrative that far, for the obvious reason that it would demean the “barly-breed” (symbolizing wives) which she wishes to commend. Thus she brings into play a carefully extracted *auctoritee*, unparalleled in the *Adversus Jovinianum* but picking up on Jerome’s food-imagery and nullifying its threat to her argument.

By this technique of adding contrary *auctoritates*, deploying a partial quotation here and making a shift of emphasis there, the Wife of Bath pursues her exegesis of Jerome’s exegesis of Paul’s doctrine of marriage, allowing the institution to emerge with higher praise and prestige than it was afforded in her *originalia*.³⁴ To dismiss this sort of argument as ridiculous casuistry would be to diminish the challenge of what Chaucer is doing. We are being confronted with perfectly good academic technique, which may be compared with Peter Abelard’s famous review of debating methods in the *Sic et Non* prologue.³⁵ To be more specific, her clever deployment of selective quotation may be compared (to take an example selected at random) with how the unimpeachable St. Thomas Aquinas deals with the issue of whether Christ should have manifested by proof the truth of his resurrection.

Against the proposition Aquinas quotes St. Ambrose: “Where you are searching for faith, take away all proofs.”³⁶ But this would seem to be contradicted by Acts 1:3, where we are told that Christ showed himself alive after His passion, “by many proofs, for forty days appearing to them and speaking of the kingdom of God”: here the notion of proof seems to be validated. Aquinas proceeds to explain that the sense of the Ambrose passage depends on the meaning of the word “proof” (*argumentum*), which can be clarified only by knowledge of the saint’s overall argument. Ambrose was speaking merely of proofs involving human reasoning, which are not valid in matters of faith.³⁷ It is evident, then, that Aquinas presented an argument merely in order to reject it subsequently, by appeal to authorial intention and what was sometimes termed the “circumstances of the letter,” i.e., the fuller context which illuminates the true meaning of the passage under discussion.

The charge that the “circumstances of the letter” of an *auctoritas* had not been respected was, of course, an effective way of dismissing an opponent’s partial quotation—and not just in Latin treatises. In the Middle English *Dives and Pauper* (written between 1405 and 1410) “Diues” challenges his opponent “Pauper” with the words of Solomon, “Give me neither beggary nor riches, lest being compelled by poverty I should forswear the name of my God” (cf. Proverbs 30:8–9), from which he concludes that every man should busily flee from “povert, beggeri & myscheef.”³⁸ “Pauper” retorts that his opponent should also seek to flee from riches, for in Solomon’s prayer “ben conteyned mo wordis þan þou rehersist”: “he forsook boþe richessis & beggerie.” Such interpretive expediency, as practiced by “Diues,” is all too common, laments “Pauper”: you apply whichever part of the Scriptural text you like, leaving behind anything you don’t like! “But þou doist as manye men doen. Þou alleggist þe scripture as þee liste and appliest it to þi fantasie and leeuyst bihynde what þee liste, which is a venus þi fantasie.”³⁹ However, alleging Scripture as one wished was par for the course in scholastic debate; the same schoolman who protested about the practice here criticized by “Pauper” could, a little later, be caught using that very ploy himself.

It is evident, then, that extracts from authoritative works, the *auctoritates*, were ammunition to be fired during scholastic wars of words, with full, partial, or no reference to the contexts from which they came: the schoolmen fought to win, and just about any manipulation of a source was deemed fair in debate. Alan of Lille summed up the situation memorably when he remarked that an *auctoritas* has a waxen nose which can be bent in many directions, thus taking on different meanings.⁴⁰ Such rules of academic engagement are brought into sharp focus in one of the *querelle de la*

Rose documents, a letter written by the poem's defender Jean de Montreuil, Provost of Lisle, to an unidentified Church dignitary who had criticized Jean de Meun. De Montreuil wonders if his addressee had spoken "in jest," and then appeals to male knowingness about the licensed give-and-take of scholastic *disputatio*: "we are not so severe that we do not appreciate the freedom of exchange permissible in debate (*disputando libertas*) or do not know how to be indulgent toward the exchange of words."⁴¹ In another letter, apparently to the same correspondent, he reiterates this point: "we are . . . aware how far the license of disputation (*disputandi licentia*) extends and how often the early morning disputation contradicts the conclusions of the evening before."⁴² The Wife of Bath brilliantly exploits this freedom of exchange, contradicting the conclusions which Jankyn culled from his "book of wikked wyves" (III(D) 685) with counterarguments drawn from, or at least prompted by, the very same source. She proves to be an excellent twister of texts, and—however controversial her views may be—there is no faulting her technique.

What Alisoun is doing is less significant than *who* is doing it. It is not just that she is acting and talking like a man—the crucial point is that she is behaving like an educated man, a graduate of the "scoles of clergie." Or indeed, like a preacher—and a real preacher at that, not just a metaphorical one who teaches love-doctrine, as in the Pardoner's formulation; maybe a true word was being said in his jest. Dr. Samuel Johnson once infamously remarked, "A woman's preaching is like a dog's walking on his hinder legs. It is not done well; but you are surprized to find it done at all."⁴³ What is surprising about the Wife of Bath, however, is how well she performs those pedagogic processes which the Friar, rendered uneasy by her virtuoso performance, wants to confine within their official channels. There was nothing particularly troubling about an old woman teaching about love and womanly wiles—witness Ovid's Dipsas and Jean de Meun's old crone. But the *Wife's Prologue and Tale* surmount the confining discourses of that *olde daunce* (cf. I(A) 476). Having seized the *disputandi licentia* from her "clerk of Oxenford," Alisoun can sometimes sound like a *doctrix* rather than a *magistra amoris*. But only sometimes. Whatever Chaucer made of the Wife of Bath, her origins are unmistakable, and often the poet exploits them to the full. Thus discourses relating to her mock-*magisterium* of love and marriage on the one hand, and to her moral "doctorate" on the other, are in constant competition through the text, an unstable compound indeed.

For the moment we may concentrate on one of Alisoun's activities as (occasional, intermittent) *doctrix*: the nature and method of her Scriptural exegesis. This issue is of considerable importance in helping us determine the extent to which, if at all, Chaucer implicated

distinctively Lollard ideas in his construction of the Wife of Bath. Alisoun remarks that she understands “expres” (i.e., clearly) the Scriptural command to be fruitful and multiply; furthermore, while God has never defended marriage “by expres word” neither has He commanded virginity in such an open manner (III(D) 27, 61). This idiom, it has been claimed by Alcuin Blamires,⁴⁴ is highly revealing because in Lollard hermeneutics the adverb “expresseli” is sometimes used to describe the literal, plain, obvious, and “open” meaning or understanding of Scripture. For instance, Bishop Pecock’s complaint about certain unruly women who “argue and dispute aȝens clerkis” (as quoted above) occurs in the context of an attack on the doctrine that no deed can be considered virtuous unless it is “expresseli” vouched for by holy Writ.⁴⁵ That doctrine derives from Wyclif himself, who argued that in the Bible may be found the basis of all true Christian practice (the doctrine sometimes termed *scriptura sola*).⁴⁶ “Suppono quod religio christiana dicat simpliciter religionem quam Christus in evangelio *expresse* instituit sine conmixtione cerimoniae humanae posterius explicate.” Thus claimed Wyclif in the treatise *De religione* which he wrote no later than December 1376 (according to Eric Doyle’s dating).⁴⁷ Attacking its tenets in the Oxford *Quattuor determinationes in materia de religione* of 1389/90, William Woodford argued that, if we rely on the Bible alone, the Donatist heresy can be defended, the sacramental baptism of the Apostles (other than Paul) can be denied, and we lack justification for the sign of the cross and the solemnization of Sunday. Furthermore, bishops, archbishops, and primates may be abolished!⁴⁸ Woodford proceeds to reduce such literalism to absurdity. The propositions “God is three persons” and “the Son is consubstantial with the Father” are more necessary to salvation than is the truth that Tobit had a dog, yet they are less “expressly” stated in Scripture (*non est ita expressa contenta in sacra scriptura*).⁴⁹ Pecock devised a more robust version of such ridicule by enumerating the many things which Lollards do that are not specifically mentioned in the Bible, including the wearing of breeches, cloaks and gowns; telling the time with clocks; brewing ale; singing, playing, and laughing for “esement”; and using the English language to make known the Old and New Testaments to layfolk. Indeed, they might well find it difficult to sit on the privy, or get up from it, because they have to base their behavior on what is “groundid expresseli in Holy Scripture”! And Lollard women cannot find any Biblical warrant for such activities as washing, bathing, or wearing coverchiefs (of silk or linen) on their heads.⁵⁰ But, to return to Wyclif himself: there seems little doubt that, to all intents and purposes, he did hold the doctrine as here attacked. Paul de Vooght’s argument that Woodford more or less invented the idea of *scriptura sola* and foisted it

upon Wyclif, simply does not stand up.⁵¹

So, then, is the Wife of Bath “applying” a “Lollard vocabulary in a Lollard manner” at III(D) 27 and 61, as Blamires suggests?⁵² We should not leap to that conclusion, I believe, for several reasons. For a start, the term “expresseli” was not marked indelibly by Lollardy, as the citations in the *Middle English Dictionary* make clear.⁵³ Blamires himself admits that in Lollard texts the incidence of “*expres* and its cognates” does “not reach eye-catching levels,” and offers several “straightforward examples” of *expres*/ *expressly* being used in “orthodox sources.”⁵⁴ Thus his suggestion that these terms should be added to Anne Hudson’s “Lollard Sect Vocabulary” strikes me as somewhat rash.⁵⁵ In any case, Hudson’s approach to this problem of identification is quite circumspect and tentative. Speaking of such terms as she does regard as being—in some contexts at least—redolent of Lollardy, she cautions that “No exclusive claim can be made” for the language under discussion; “vocabulary alone can never be used . . . as a test of a text’s Wycliffism.”⁵⁶

Moving away therefore from vocabulary to seek a distinctively Wycliffite hermeneutic, it may be noted that, of course, many examples of rigorous literalism are to be found in Lollard texts. For instance, in the tract *De oblatione iugis sacrificii* those who wish to maintain “þe souerente of perfeccioun of þe gospel” (following the model of those who worshipped in the early Church) are urged to eschew “lordschip or wordli possession,” a doctrine the gospel teaches in diverse places. “And as litteralli as Crist tau3t in his conclusioun, so litteralli he and his disciplis, and perW3t prestis long after and oþur perW3t peple also kept þis conclusioun, wiþout any glosing or oþur vndurstanding þan Crist tau3t hem in worde and in dede.”⁵⁷ The connection between literal understanding and moral action is made very clear, as is Lollard distrust of “glosing” which diverges from the explicit teachings and manifest deeds of Jesus Christ. But interest in the “literal sense” of Scripture was hardly confined to Wyclif’s disciples; indeed, one of the major sources of their literalism was the *Postilla litteralis* of Nicholas of Lyre, a quite orthodox masterpiece of fourteenth-century exegesis which was widely influential in quite orthodox circles. Besides, the Lollards were perfectly willing to move from literal to spiritual sense when it suited them. “William Thorpe” presumed to give Archbishop Arundel a lesson on the allegorical exegesis of Psalm 150 (3–5), affirming that “the letter kills” (cf. II Corinthians 3:6) is a crucial principle in the interpretation of this and similar texts. Arundel, as here presented, had sought support for his advocacy of recreational singing and bagpipe-playing for the “solace” of weary pilgrims in the Psalter, wherein David teaches men to use “dyuerse instrumentis of musik for to preise wiþ God.” “Thorpe” will

have none of it: “þe letter of þis psalme of Daviþ and of siche opere psalmes and sentencis sleen hem þat taken hem now aftir þe lettre.”⁵⁸ In fact, declares “Thorpe,” those instruments with their music ought to be interpreted “goostly” (i.e., spiritually), because they all figure “hiþe vertues and grete.”⁵⁹ It would seem, then, that in the distinction between literal and allegorical interpretation, no convenient way of contrasting orthodox and heterodox hermeneutics may be found.

Therefore we need more telling detail, more blatantly obvious Wycliffite terminology and thought, to render convincing the claim that, when he presents Alisoun as an exegete, Chaucer is “applying” a distinctively “Lollard vocabulary” in a distinctively “Lollard manner.” The fact that such information is not forthcoming may be construed as proof that here Chaucer simply did not wish to bring into play “a specifically Lollard cast of mind.”⁶⁰ This lack of interest or reticence (however one wishes to construct it) is comparable to the way in which Chaucer remains within the bounds of traditional antifraternal satire in having the Summoner depict an unscrupulous friar who twists the text of Scripture to serve his own material needs and those of his brother-friars.

I have to day been at youre chirche at messe,
And seyde a sermon after my symple wit—
Nat al after the text of hooly writ,
For it is hard to yow, as I suppose,
And therefore wol I teche yow al the glose.
Glosynge is a glorious thyng, certeyn,
For lettre sleeth, so as we clerkes seyn . . . (*Summoner's Tale*, III(D) 1788–94)

Such conspicuous distrust of “glosing” may recall the negative estimation of this expository process in the passage from the Wycliffite *De oblatione iugis sacrificii* which was quoted above. On the other hand, “William Thorpe” had no problem in accepting and applying the interpretive principle that the “lettre sleeth,” as we have also noted. These Lollard testimonies seem to cancel each other out, in respect of facilitating the detection of dissenting discourse in Chaucer’s text.

Appalling the Summoner’s Friar may be, but there is no evidence that Chaucer’s disapproval has an unequivocally Lollard cast. He certainly does not go down the route of the fifteenth-century antifraternal poem “Allas, what schul we freris do?” wherein a friar-persona laments that nowadays “lewed” men know “Holy Writ” and hence “aposen me of it,” i.e., oppose him with Scriptural citation (1–4).

I trowe the devel browght it aboute
To write the Gospel in Englishe;
For lewed man ben now so stowt
That thei geven us neyther fleche ne fishe. (9–12)⁶¹

The friars are undone unless this can be remedied. Layfolk are now wise to their money-grubbing tricks—why, soon there will scarcely be friars left in England! (33–36). As John Scattergood says, the “positions assumed here are broadly Lollard,” and “it is therefore likely that the author of these verses was a Lollard sympathizer”;⁶² the reference to “the Gospel” being made widely available “in Englishe” is particularly telling. In contrast, Chaucer’s Summoner does not include in his attack on self-serving fraternal “glosing” a remark to the effect that now, thank God, the Gospel is available in English and hence layfolk are able to allege it against greedy friars. The churl who is the Friar’s victim opposes him not with a pithy Biblical *auctoritee* but with a resounding fart—a response which, hilariously, is seen by a group of aristocrats as a solution by *demonstratif preeve* to a scholastic “probleme” posed to the friar—a matter so difficult that the “devel” must have put it into the churl’s “mynde” (III(D) 2219, 2221, 2272).⁶³ Here is an intriguing indication of interest in, and some technical knowledge of, academic disputation-technique among the laity, knowledge of a kind which enabled that learned layman Geoffrey Chaucer to depict the Wife of Bath as a masterly debater. But in the *Summoner’s Tale* the devil stops well short of putting into men’s minds the idea of writing the Gospel in English.

Furthermore, had Chaucer indeed “wished to gain a hearing for Lollard views via the Wife”⁶⁴ he would have been faced with a major, and I believe insuperable, problem. Alisoun is a much-traveled pilgrim, having been to Jerusalem three times and also visited Rome, Boulogne, Compostella, and Cologne (I(A) 463–67; cf. III(D) 495, 557). And here she is, in the present tense of Chaucer’s fiction, en route to Canterbury, “the hooly blisful martir for to seke.”⁶⁵ However, Wycliffites were fiercely critical of pilgrimage in general and pilgrimage to Canterbury in particular. We have already considered how Richard Godmersham (assuming for the moment that he is the author of the treatise in question) included “the carping Lollards” among those sinners against the Holy Spirit who dared to question the Canterbury plenary indulgence as granted by Honorius III.⁶⁶ Lollard resistance could be even more shocking (to orthodox sensibilities) than that. The eighth of the Wycliffite *Twelve Conclusions*, which were displayed during the session of Parliament from 27 January to 15 February 1395, holds that the matter of St. Thomas à Becket “were no cause of martyrdom,” and William White, who was burnt at Norwich in 1429, was credited with a similar view.⁶⁷ One of White’s followers, Margery Baxter, is reported as having said at her trial (again in 1429) that “Saint Thomas of Canterbury was a false traitor and is damned in hell because he injuriously endowed churches with possessions, and he prompted and encouraged many heresies in the Church which

deceive the simple people”; furthermore, far from dying “patiently before the altar,” as “a false, foolish traitor he was killed as he fled in the doorway of the church.”⁶⁸ Of such extremism there is, of course, not a trace in the *Canterbury Tales*, and (to the best of our knowledge) neither did Chaucer share the Lollard distaste for pilgrimage. He was quite willing to include “himself” in the Canterbury party, and several of his major characters are veteran pilgrims—including the Pardoner, who recently has returned from Rome, and the Wife of Bath herself, as already noted. Those two figures are, to be sure, criticized for many reasons, but going on pilgrimage does not seem to be one of them. And that most idealized of Chaucer’s *dramatis personae*, the Parson, is right there with them. Had he actually held Wycliffite views, surely he would not be on the road to Canterbury? The Host may find in the Parson’s objection to the swearing of great oaths an opening to insult him as a Lollard (II(B1) 1173–77).⁶⁹ But in that jibe we encounter the dynamics of insult of a kind which may also be operating in the *General Prologue*’s portrait of the Pardoner (cf. our discussion in Chapter 2 above). The fact that the Pardoner may look a bit like a “geldyng or a mare” (I(A) 691) does not mean that he actually is either a “geldyng” or a “mare” in some material manner. The fact that the Parson may sound a bit like a Lollard when objecting to the Host’s swearing does not mean that he actually is a Lollard. (Otherwise we might end up believing that, after all, Hitler had only got one ball and Goering had two but they were small.) Furthermore, it is the Parson who lends *gravitas* to the present earthly enterprise by placing it in its true spiritual perspective with reference to the “parfit glorious pilgrymage / That highte Jerusalem celestial” (X(1) 50–51).

Even more compelling is the fact that the Wife’s most obvious area of expertise is not some mainstream Lollard preoccupation like the Eucharist, but marriage, a sacrament and institution which seems not to have enjoyed much attention within Wycliffite theology. Most of what is said is relatively conventional, and when the thinking does become original this occurs in areas which are far removed from Chaucer’s own interests in the *Wife of Bath’s Prologue and Tale*. A full review of Wycliffite theology of marriage (such as it was) is long overdue, hence my attempt to initiate one in the following section. This material will, I hope, place us in a position to understand better the manner in which Chaucer has transformed the *magistra amoris*—though he never allows us to forget the limiting, constraining force of that foundational figure—into a *doctrinx* on the topic of marriage, with a particular interest in the unbridling of female desire,⁷⁰ a prospect which Wyclif and at least some of his followers (to judge by what they *did* say about sex in relation to marriage) would have reacted against in the most puritanical of terms. It is time, then, to move away from

Alisoun's mastery of the techniques of argumentation and exegesis which have been the subject of the present section (techniques which, I have suggested, do not bear any distinctive impress of Lollardy), to consider how Chaucer positions her in relation to orthodox and heterodox thought about the "actes" and "fruyt of mariage."

II. UNBRIDLING DESIRE: FEMALE SEXUALITY AND THE MAKING OF MARRIAGE

Strange as it may seem, in the midst of the many recent attempts to read much of Chaucer's poetry within the context of Lollard and anti-Lollard polemic, with the exception of a ground-breaking discussion by Alcuin Blamires⁷¹ little has been done to address the question: what is the relationship, if any, between Lollard doctrine concerning marriage and the doctrine expressed by Dame Alisoun of Bath? The matter becomes all the more tantalizing when it is realized that the Lollards seem to have had little to say about marriage—indeed, I would go so far as to say that they failed to produce a substantial and comprehensive theology concerning this particular sacrament.

An Unstable Human Matter

In one of his few disquisitions on marriage, which appears in the *Trialogus* (1382), John Wyclif puts a highly revealing statement in the mouth of his spokesman, Phronesis.⁷² The question of the correct form of words or signs to use in celebrating a marriage having been raised, Phronesis retorts that he does not take much pleasure from the lips (presumably because they utter the words of consent to marry) in this matter, i.e., the matter of how marriage should be made, because this "is humanly instituted, often without [good] foundation."⁷³ A little earlier, the same figure had declared that he takes no pleasure in multiplying reasons for divorce, since many of them are "humanly ordained without [good] foundation."⁷⁴ Phronesis's pleasure-deficit is quite typical of his creator's attitude to the subject of marriage regulation: when this topic arises, Wyclif's tone seems dismissive, impatient.⁷⁵

And yet—it would have been very advantageous to their polemic if Wyclif and his followers had taken more interest, if not more pleasure, in the unstable human matter of the laws regulating marriage.⁷⁶ Perhaps only the Welsh Wycliffite Walter Brut—and his opponents—saw the full potential of a Lollard theology of marriage as a means of attacking orthodox valorizations of the role of the priesthood in the consecration of the sacraments. Having noted that baptism may be performed by non-ordained persons—whether male or female—if no

priest is available, Brut goes on to argue that women may also fulfill the sacrament of marriage, “since that sacrament is effected in the words” of the man and woman who are getting married, “not in the words of the priest when he blesses them (*in verbis benedicientis*).” He adds—quite in line with orthodox doctrine—that the priest’s words “are not of the essence of the sacrament, though they are instituted for the ornamentation and solemnization (*ad decorem et solempnitatem*) of the sacrament.”⁷⁷ (Traditionally, the bride and groom would say the words which constituted the actual marriage contract—on which more later—at the church door, and then enter the church to receive the priest’s blessing.)⁷⁸ This is a major plank of Brut’s argument that the sacraments—including the sacrament of the altar—may be performed (at least in certain circumstances) by virtuous layfolk, even by women (cf. the discussion in our previous chapter). It is somewhat surprising, however, that Brut *cum suis* did not devote more effort to working out a full Lollard theology of marriage, centered on the ideas here summarized, particularly in view of their major polemical potential. But perhaps here the innate forces of conservatism were particularly strong—and the Lollards had, in their own judgment, bigger sacramental issues to worry about, most notably those pertaining to the Eucharist.

What they *did* comment on occasionally (though here too the pickings are slim) was the matter of clerical celibacy. Wyclif himself had questioned whether celibacy was an essential requirement for the priesthood, but did not go so far as to advocate the marriage of clergymen and vowed religious.⁷⁹ Of particular interest to Chaucerians is the fact that, in one of his responses to Ralph Strode, Wyclif declared that there is nothing in Scripture to prohibit the marriage of priests.⁸⁰ However, he had so little to say on the subject that, when Thomas Netter homed in on this heresy in his *Doctrinale*, he found it difficult to find good targets in Wyclif’s own writings,⁸¹ and instead fulminated against the views of “Willelmus Albus” (William White), of which he had some basic knowledge, padding out the discussion with copious quotation from the likes of Jerome, Ambrose (actually Ambrosiaster), and Augustine.⁸² The Wycliffite *Twelve Conclusions* are more forthcoming. The third asserts that the “lawe of continence annexyd to presthod”—which was first ordained “in preiudys of wimmen”—actually brings “sodomie in al holy chirche.”⁸³ A dire warning is sounded about the dangers of the “delicious metis and drinkis” which clerics enjoy: such delicacies must have “nedful purgaciun or werse.”⁸⁴ That is to say, if no women are available, men will inevitably seek to vent their lusts with other men.⁸⁵ Similar statements may be found in the Lollard treatise *Of Weddid Men and Wifis and of Here Children Also*.⁸⁶ Many men “yong and strong of

complexion” become priests to have a lustful and easy life, “and faren wel of mete and drynk,” and will not work either in penance or in studying God’s law; neither will they labor with their hands.⁸⁷ Whereupon “thei fallen into lecherie in dyverse degrees, and in synne agenst kynde.” This, then, is what happens when they “forsaken wifis bi Goddis lawe,” i.e., legal marriage as approved by God, here seen as the best method for bridling male desire.⁸⁸

Such arguments, and their refutations, had been around for some time before the Lollard heresy developed, and existed beyond the confines of the English Church. For example, St. Bridget of Sweden insisted that no-one should believe that, “for the sake of avoiding sodomy, fornication is at all permissible for clerics; nor, for that reason, is it to be endured that they should defile themselves with women.”⁸⁹ Elsewhere she vehemently attacked what she saw as the horrifying possibility that clerical marriage might be permitted by some foolish pontiff. (Marriage had unequivocally been denied to priests through a series of councils culminating in the Second Lateran Council of 1139, which is generally taken as marking the victory of the cause of celibacy.)⁹⁰ If some pope were rash enough to concede to priests “a license to contract carnal marriage,” she asserts, God would condemn him to the most extreme of spiritual punishments, culminating in his soul being “tormented eternally in hell,” serving as “the food of demons everlastingly and without end.”⁹¹ No room for doubt or debate there. Thus Bridget sought to ensure that priests who consecrate the “precious sacrament” of the Eucharist “should by no means live in the easily contaminated, carnal delight of marriage,” her zeal kindled by a desire to defend the “holy” and “most worthy” office of priesthood.⁹²

Returning to the Lollard statements in the *Twelve Conclusions* which support clerical marriage, it may be said that, despite their brevity, their import is utterly clear. Unfortunately, this is not true of the Third Lollard Conclusion’s reference to clerical continence having been ordained “in preiudys of wimmen.” Roger Dymmok, writing against the *Twelve Conclusions* for the edification of King Richard II, evidently was unsure of what it meant.⁹³ However, we may conclude that it does not bespeak any fundamental desire to affirm the worth of women, since in the Eleventh Conclusion women are deemed so “fekil and vnperfyth in kynde” that, if they make a vow of continence, this will lead them into “most horrible synne.” (Presumably this refers to outrageous promiscuity with men and perhaps even with other women.)⁹⁴ Widows should re-marry rather than take a vow of chastity, “for we can nout excusin hem fro priue synnis”⁹⁵—in other words, such a vow will merely lead them into secret sin, and it’s far better for their passions to find a relatively safe outlet within marriage.

Male clergymen and female religious—seen as constituting social groups particularly vulnerable to lust—are here being offered a means of sexual restraint and normalization which had long been used to justify marriage for layfolk. Rejection of marriage was, after all, itself a heresy, as held for instance by the Cathars.⁹⁶ “The felt need of orthodox thinkers to defend it against the attacks of heretics” has been identified as a major reason why marriage was the sacrament that “received the fullest discussion on the part of canonists and theologians alike” in the first part of the twelfth century.⁹⁷ Writing over two hundred years later, the Lollard author of *Of Weddid Men and Wifis* expresses that same “felt need,” though for him such arguments are part and parcel of a justification of clerical marriage:

the Holy Gost warneth Cristen men, hou in the laste daies summe heretikus schullen departe fro feith of Goddis lawe, gevenge entente to spiritis of error, and to techyng of develis, spekyng lesyngis in ypocrisie, forbedyng men and wymmen to be weddid, and techyng men to abstene hem fro metis, the whiche God hath maad to be eten of trewe men, with thankyngis and heriyng of God. . . . [H]e that forbedith or lettith verrey matrimonye is enemye of God and seyntis in hevene and alle mankynde.⁹⁸

This connection of food-prohibitions with the rejection of matrimony may be taken as proof positive that the Middle English author had Catharism in mind (or at least a view which had become known due to the corpus of orthodox literature directed against Catharism).⁹⁹ For Cathar *perfecti* refused to eat any of the products of coition (e.g., meat, milk, eggs and cheese), though they permitted the consumption of fish, on the mistaken assumption that these creatures grew from water itself. And of course, all sexual contact was firmly forbidden.¹⁰⁰ This stands in intriguing contrast to the Lollard connection between clerics’ indulgence in good “mete and drynk” and their sexual lusts, which must be bridled by legal sexual contact within marriage, according to *Of Weddid Men and Wifis*. Since fornication is so perilous, and men and women so frail, declares its author, God allowed priests under the Old Law to have wives, “and nevere forbode it in the newe lawe,” neither by Christ nor his Apostles—rather he approved it. But nowadays, through the “ypocrisie of fendis and false men,” many people “bynden hem to presthod and chastité,” even though they have no aptitude for it. In particular, many sons and daughters of gentlemen are forced to enter religious orders against their will, “whanne thei ben childre withouten discrecion,” in order that the one “child that is most lovyd” inherits all the property. (An unclear statement, which could be read as going against the practice of primogeniture, as far as male children are concerned. But perhaps the author is seeking a category which can include girls as well.) And when they come of age, for fear of what may happen to them in the outside world if they leave their order, and on account of “ypocrise and flatirynge, and faire behestis of thes

religious,” such people remain within the religious estate, even though they know they are unsuitable for it. “And hereof cometh lecherie and symtyme mortherynge of many men.”¹⁰¹

That last remark is particularly puzzling. Is it a product of torrid imagination to the effect that sexual frustration and deviancy can lead to major crimes, including murder, perhaps of people (here I assume that “men” covers humankind in general) unfortunate enough to have got involved with those unstable and dangerous religious? What is quite clear is that the excursus as a whole bespeaks Lollard distrust of men and women being forced into making impossible vows, a viewpoint which is also manifest in the eleventh of the *Twelve Conclusions*, as quoted above.¹⁰² All such heterodox thought is left behind, however, as the treatise *Of Weddid Men and Wifis* moves into uncontested territory by declaring that “though matrimonye be good and gretly comendid of God, yit clene virgynité is moche betre.”¹⁰³ The subsequent discussion remains well within the bounds of conventional thought about marriage.

The passages quoted above constitute the most substantial Lollard statements concerning married priests to have come down to us. Fainter echoes are heard occasionally, as when a questionnaire developed by the authorities for the identification of heretics which is preserved in the Register of Thomas Polton, Bishop of Worcester (1426–33) includes the item: “whether it is permitted (*licitum*) for a priest to have a wife.”¹⁰⁴ Even more tantalizingly, William White, an ordained priest who illegally had married a woman called Joan and, *sub colore matrimonii*, lived with her *quasi laicus* for two years and more, is reported as believing that enforced celibacy was the cause of much corruption within the clergy.¹⁰⁵ But all we have to go on here is a curt trial record. If White—or any of his fellow-Lollards—wrote a fuller defense of clerical marriage, it has not survived.¹⁰⁶

What has survived, however, is the impact of White’s teaching on many men and women in Kent and East Anglia,¹⁰⁷ as manifest in the Norwich heresy trials of 1428–31. John Skyllly recanted the belief that “it is leful prestes to take wyves and nunnes to take husbondes and dwelle togeder as wyff and husbond, holding that lyff more commendable than to lyve chaste.”¹⁰⁸ Similar opinions are attributed to six other East Anglian Lollards.¹⁰⁹ The uniformity of these statements is remarkable,¹¹⁰ as is also the case with those about another topic relating to marriage, namely the importance of mutual consent, what the trial records sometimes call *consensus amoris* or *consensus mutui amoris*. This is one of the views which Hawisia Moone claimed to have heard expressed in “soles of heresie”: “oonly consent of love betuxe man and woman, withoute contract of words and withoute solennizacion in Church and withoute symbred askyng [i.e.,

calling of banns], is sufficient for the sacrament of matrimoy[n].”¹¹¹ No fewer than twenty-four of the other Lollards tried by William Alnwick, Bishop of Norwich, thought likewise.¹¹² Occasionally there are minor variations in the records, as when John Kynget said that “oonly consent in hert” suffices for marriage (“consent of love in Jhu’ Crist” is the phrase preferred by others), or when William Hardy condemned church solemnization as “but vayneglorie induced be covetise of prestes to gete mony of the puple.” These comments may be compared with Walter Brut’s assertion that no priest is necessary for the making of marriage; rather the sacrament is effected by what the bride and groom say to each other. However, the Norwich group of Lollards have got hold of the idea that *no* verbal contract is necessary, that marriage can be made *sine aliquo contractu per verba*.¹¹³ The emphasis falls rather on the “consent of love”—but how, it may be asked, can this be expressed without words? Are words quite unnecessary, an internal feeling of commitment being the essential requirement? In seeking answers to the questions raised by this testimony, we may turn to the most original Lollard statement concerning marital consent—a text which, however, poses many interpretive problems of its own.

I refer to the section *de sacramento conjugii* in a collection of errors extracted from a “heretical book” of John Purvey’s by Richard Lavenham in the period 1395–1400.¹¹⁴ The third paragraph (the easiest to comprehend of the seven paragraphs which make up this document) starts off with the assertion that the view which follows isn’t contrary to the chapter *Si inter de sponsalibus*, i.e., one of Pope Gregory IX’s decretals. A valuable reference-point is here provided, since this part of the *Decretales* was *the* central canon-legal statement about exchanging vows with words which express consent to marry, and what actually constituted the contract (known as the *desponsatio*).¹¹⁵ A marriage could be made by words of either present consent (*verba de presenti*) or future consent (*verba de futuro*): that is to say, either the couple undertook to marry at that very moment, or promised to marry at some point in the future (perhaps with certain conditions attached). And present consent was by far the stronger form of *desponsatio*. “The efficient cause of marriage is consent, and not any kind of consent, but consent expressed in words which refer not to the future but to the present,” Peter Lombard had said in his *Libri sententiarum*; the formula “I take you as my husband” is therefore efficacious whereas “I will take you as my husband” is not.¹¹⁶ Marriage contracted by words of present consent takes priority over a subsequent contract made by words of future consent—even if sexual intercourse has taken place in the later situation. However, if there is no previous contract, and a man and woman contract by words of future consent, and then have sexual intercourse, this constitutes

marriage. This reflects the general principle, as laid down by Gratian and the Bolognese school, that marriage is initiated by the consent of the parties but completed by subsequent sexual union.¹¹⁷ However, this principle was not always easy to square with the Lombard's emphasis on the overriding superiority of consent expressed in *verba de presenti*.¹¹⁸

What, then, does Purvey himself have to say on the subject? The third paragraph of the excursus *de sacramento conjugii* asserts that if anyone should contract a marriage with a certain woman by words of future consent (*per verba de futuro*), through the medium of an oath, and subsequently contract another marriage with another woman by words of present consent (*per verba de praesenti*), the second contract is the binding one. There is nothing radical about this. A substantial body of legal opinion would have supported this opinion—including Pope Gregory IX's chapter *de sponsalibus*, as Purvey himself notes. So far, so orthodox. But then, in the following paragraphs, Purvey brings forward tougher test-cases.

First, if a man should enter into a contract with a woman through words of future consent (*verba de futuro*), through the medium of an oath, and if some other man enters into a marriage contract with that same woman in similar form (presumably using the same type of contract, *verba de futuro*), and they have sex together, to whom is she truly married? His answer is that it's the first contract which is binding, and not the second. Hence, the *initial* verbal promise, even though it's of future consent, takes precedence over sexual consummation. A promise is a promise, it would seem, and sex should not be allowed to cloud the moral imperative of keeping one's word (certainly among "trewe cristen men" and women).¹¹⁹ What comes across loud and clear is the belief that sexual relations play no crucial role in the legalization of a marriage. This parts company with Gregory IX, and flies in the face of a large body of legal opinion (deriving from Gratian, as already noted) which held that intercourse could indeed complete a marriage, making it fully licit. Gratian would certainly have ruled in favor of the second marriage as described by Purvey, the case wherein the couple had sex following their *desponsatio*.

Purvey's second test-case (paragraph 5 in this excursus) invites us to consider the situation of a man who, having been joined in matrimony to a woman before witnesses through a contract *de praesenti*, and having had children with her, proceeds to marry another woman, once again using words of present consent. Now, the witnesses to the first marriage are either dead or have been bribed, whereas the witnesses to the second relate their testimony about the second marriage in court. The first contract is the true marriage,

declares Purvey, whereas “the law of the pope which approves of the second contract”—because there is evidence for it—“compels him to live in adultery contrary to the command of God.”¹²⁰ This Lollard seems to have been much exercised by the role of witnesses in establishing the validity of marriage-contracts, for he proceeds to raise the question (in paragraph 7) of what should be done in a situation wherein a man contracts marriage with two women, one of them secretly without witnesses and the other publicly with witnesses. According to orthodox legal theory, a clandestine marriage was legally binding if the correct words were used—but Purvey (as abbreviated here) does not go into that matter. Neither does he question which promise came first, nor give any indication of which contract he regards as the binding one—his point seems to be of a different order, viz. that no general principle can be applied here. It is better to recognize that the laws are inadequate (*jura insufficientia*), and to allow men to be governed by their own consciences (*permittere homines propriis conscientiis regulari*), “rather than to compel them on pain of censure to continue in their adultery.”

Yet another test-case is raised in the sixth paragraph, this time concerning a woman who may wish to part from her husband, knowing that consanguinity in a prohibited degree exists between the two of them, but lacking the testimony which would prove this.¹²¹ Again, canon law judges according to evidence. The Church would condemn her to remain with him on pain of censure and to pay her marriage debt—and that is quite wrong, Purvey thinks. She should be freed from any obligation to sexual relations forthwith.

What runs through all of the propositions described thus far is the conviction that the Church should keep out of the private affairs of men and women, particularly since its interventions in the sphere of marriage are heavy-handed and can be just plain wrong. This is made utterly clear by the first and second paragraphs, which concern matters of spiritual affinity (i.e., relations between godparents and their godchildren and between the godparents themselves); here Purvey’s anticlericalism shades into blatant heresy.

1. Notwithstanding spiritual affinity a man and woman can lawfully be joined in marriage, without any papal dispensation.¹²²

In other words, a godfather can marry a goddaughter—or that goddaughter’s godfather and godmother can marry each other—on Purvey’s argument, though these courses of action are prohibited by canon law. (Spiritual affinity was deemed an impediment to marriage: as Aquinas put it, just as “carnal relationship hinders marriage, even so does spiritual relationship by command of the Church.”)¹²³ Then there is a sudden leap in Lavenham’s summary:

And in the same place it is said that if our kingdom were to choose a certain illegitimate person as king then so long as he performs the office of a king well God makes him king, and as a consequence he reproves any other king or legitimate heir of the kingdom.

2. A marriage ought not to be dissolved on account of a spiritual affinity of this kind.

The statement about the office of kingship may seem out of place here, but there is a crucial connection: Lollard theory of dominion underpins this entire section of Lavenham's *abbreviatio* of Purvey's heretical book. Personal virtue is deemed the only true basis for the election of a king, no matter what the legal position may be concerning the legitimacy or illegitimacy of the candidates. It seems that God stands up for bastards if the bastards in question are *His* bastards, righteous men who are acceptable to Him. By "legitimate heir" is presumably meant the firstborn male; if so, then Purvey is implying that a younger son, even an illegitimate younger son, might well make a better king than the rightful heir. Indeed, *dominium* theory would go even further—though Purvey himself (at least, as abbreviated here) does not seem to want to. The candidate for kingship would not have to be a king's son at all, whether legitimate or illegitimate, personal righteousness— and concomitant divine favor—being the crucial factor.¹²⁴

By the same token, spiritual "parentage" should not be allowed to get in the way of a good and virtuous match. The fact that a man may be, say, the woman's godparent is unimportant in face of their personal pious dispositions—and, one might add, the urgings of their individual consciences. (Close *physical* affinity, or consanguinity in a prohibited degree, is a very different issue for Purvey, as we have already seen.) Such a marriage between people who are not "really" related, but are prohibited from marriage on the mere say-so of what Lollards regarded as a debased and untrustworthy institution, is a matter for the individuals themselves, and between the couple and their God. Thus, the establishment's restrictive views on hereditary succession and spiritual affinity are of a kind and may be subjected to the same type of attack.

Here, then, is the basis of the connection between these apparently disparate statements. And it is little wonder that Purvey's views struck a raw nerve with the authorities. The sacrament of marriage was exceptionally difficult to theorize, and the amount of control which the Church had over the practice of marriage was quite limited. A church ceremony was not required to make a union binding and indissoluble. True, a couple sinned by not having their banns published and failing to have their union blessed by a priest, and the Church vigorously sought to counter the practice of clandestine marriage. Whatever one may think about such attempts to encroach on an institution which was not of the Church's own making, it should

be recognized that the formal solemnization of a marriage performed a practical service of the first importance, insofar as it ensured that the contract was properly witnessed. But Purvey does not see any advantages of this kind in the Church's involvement in marriage. For him the rule of individual conscience is paramount—such inner convictions being governed, no doubt, by the teachings of the Wycliffite *vera ecclesia*.

Wyclif's own brief remarks in the *Dialogus* are in general agreement with (and rendered more comprehensible by) these comments of Purvey.¹²⁵ He has Phronesis argue that the "word of the mind" (*verbum mentis*) is more important, of far greater weight, in contracting marriage than mere "word of mouth" (*verbum oris*). If it's true that, certain words having been uttered, marriage is contracted, then the corollary follows that if these were not uttered there would *not* be a marriage. But, Phronesis continues, this proposition may easily be disproved with reference to deaf mutes who contract marriage despite their affliction: hence, the contracting of marriage isn't just a matter of saying the right words. It isn't the words that make the consent—but rather that which moves the mind or soul (*anima*) to consent. Even those most potent words of all, *verba de presenti*, are devalued as part of this same argument, as Phronesis claims that the crucial factor is what a person really thinks. For example, a man may say "I take you as my wife" and not really mean it; e.g. he may be acting merely out of lust. Wyclif also affirms the importance of divine approval (for him, marriages are definitely made in heaven), criticizing judges who rely on "naked words" (*ex nudis verbis*), i.e., mere "words of the mouth," when making judgments concerning marriage. Cursed be a law whereby a judge through spurious censures forces the matrimonial yoke on people, obliging them to act contrary to divine law! Furthermore: if words of future consent are true (i.e., expressive of mental consent) and approved by God, why should they be gainsaid by subsequent words of present consent, which are not efficacious in this way— i.e., they may not be true and they may lack divine approval? Particularly interesting is the fact that for Wyclif, as for Purvey, the idea that sexual relations can play a crucial role in completing a marriage contract is quite distasteful. God doesn't need that kind of help, declares Phronesis; it's utterly inappropriate for His work. Here both radicals are, of course, at variance with Gratian and Gregory IX, and a host of commentators on the *Sentences*.¹²⁶

This variance is recognized by another character in the *Dialogus*, Alithia, who remarks that Phronesis is speaking against the laws of the Church—not something a prudent man should do. Phronesis's response is that his colleague shouldn't expect from him a diffusion

and rationalization of existing church law; rather he's warning him to be on his guard against the "trickeries and infidelities" that have entered the subject.¹²⁷ According to Thomas Netter, it was Wyclif himself who had brought "trickeries and infidelities" into the subject, and he shows no quarter, seeing in his adversary's disregard for sensible signs in the making of marriage a contempt for all the sacraments as traditionally constituted.¹²⁸ Although ideally what one says should agree with what one really thinks, one is judged by the spoken word, Netter asserts. At Luke 19:22 the Savior said, "Out of thy own mouth I judge thee, thou wicked servant," rather than "out of your mind (*ex mente*)," with which may be compared His statement at John 5:30, "as I hear, so I judge." It is true that deaf mutes cannot speak, but in contracting marriage they make some other kind of external sign to indicate their internal consent, and so their case does not support Wyclif's theory.¹²⁹ Following Augustine's *De baptismo contra Donatistas* Netter then develops a comparison with Simon Magus, who was truly baptized, even though he lacked charity and was deficient in respect of the "thought of his heart" (cf. Acts 8:13ff.).¹³⁰ By the same token, a man who doesn't have the right feelings for some deluded woman may actually marry her outwardly, *secundum extrinsecum sacramentum*: this is nevertheless a marriage. That is to say, the man can't claim he didn't actually marry her just because he lacked the right feelings in his heart.

Wyclif's argument that words of present consent may be less reliable than words of future consent (as when words *de futuro* express the true *verbum mentis* and make a marriage which is pleasing to God) is then reduced to absurdity. How ridiculous it would be if a creditor were to tell his debtor, "I *now* release you, because I *will* release you later," or if one were to say, "this boy is *now* the pope or a bishop because forty years from now that is what he *will* be." The heavy artillery is then wheeled out—Saint Augustine's doctrine of time. "That dawn which I see in the sky is not the rising of the sun"; that is to say, "future things . . . are not as yet; and if they are not as yet, they are not."¹³¹ Although future events can be predicted from events which exist in the here and now, they simply do not exist; "present" and "future" differ like "being" and "non-being," or like "something" and "nothing." Therefore Wyclif errs in claiming that *accipiam te* ("I will take you [in marriage]") is more certain and less disputable than *accipio te* ("I take you now . . ."). The philosophers are against him: "The future is doubtful," says Seneca, while Cicero remarks, "Hours indeed, and days and months and years depart, nor does past time ever return, nor can the future be known."¹³² As is holy Scripture: "Boast not for tomorrow, for thou knowest not what the day to come may bring forth" (Proverbs 27:1). And God Himself chose words in the

present tense (the imperative presuming the present) when He created the first things: “Be light made” (Genesis 1:3), “Let the waters be gathered” (v. 9), “Be fruitful and multiply” (v. 22), “Let us make man” (v. 26), and so on. Indeed, in His eternity He used words *de praesenti*, not *de futuro*, saying, “This is my name: I am who I am,” rather than “I am who I will be” (cf. Exodus 3:14).¹³³ These are formidable arguments. It must be admitted, however, that Wyclif had left himself highly vulnerable in this area. And Netter knows it. The phrase “shooting fish in a barrel” comes to mind.

But precisely how radical are the views here attacked; how far did Wyclif and Purvey deviate from what was regarded as permissible controversy on what are, after all, intensely complicated human problems, issues hardly susceptible of logical resolution? It may be revealing to compare a relevant discussion by another medieval theologian, who shall remain nameless for the moment—in order to avoid any preconceptions about what sort of stance he will adopt. This thinker gives much weight to the view (attributed to Innocent III) that “in the absence of consent other things cannot complete the marriage bond,”¹³⁴ restating it in his *solutio*: “expression of words without inward consent makes no marriage.” “If mental consent is lacking in one of the parties, on neither side is there marriage,” he continues. And he is fully aware that his argument may go against what the “judgment of the Church” must be. The example is brought forth of a man who has consented to marry a certain woman by *verba de presenti*, but subsequently contracts marriage with another woman, also by words of present consent. Now, this man “is compelled under pain of excommunication” to take the first woman to wife, even if he says he was lacking “in mental consent” when he contracted that marriage. “In such a case the Church compels him to hold to his first wife,” explains our (temporarily anonymous) theologian, because the Church can only judge by outward appearances in this type of situation—and on the face of it he married the first woman by words of present consent. And yet—the principle of inward consent retains its appeal for this schoolman, so much so that he makes the extraordinary remark, “such a man ought to bear the excommunication rather than return to his first wife; or else he should go far away into another country.”

Who is speaking here, some subversive Wycliffite? Far from it. I have been quoting from St. Thomas Aquinas’s commentary on the *Sentences*.¹³⁵ Aquinas too seems to have thought that marriage is an unstable, exasperating, and chaotic “humanly instituted” matter which frequently lacks a good foundation (to echo the words of Wyclif’s Phronesis). In holding this view, Aquinas was by no means alone among irreproachable schoolmen, as may be illustrated from

comments made by the Franciscan Richard of Middleton as he wrestles with the problem, if a couple have sexual intercourse following consent expressed merely in words *de futuro*, can they proceed to contract marriage with others?¹³⁶ Some say that, even though the first marriage was not a true one, the people in question cannot make subsequent contracts with others (both of the original partners being alive). But although this opinion is probable (*probabilis*) nevertheless it is not correct, explains Richard. The first marriage, since it was not a true but rather a presumptive one, does not constitute a real impediment to contracting marriage with others. However, the Church is obliged to judge “about interior things through exterior presumptions,” and so may not see things that way. Even though one of the people in question—Richard emphasizes that the man and the woman are to be considered equally—may proceed to make a secure contract and be married according to the judgment of God, yet the Church may try to force this person to return to his or her original partner, under the threat of severe ecclesiastical censure. However, the couple “ought rather to allow themselves to be excommunicated and undergo any punishment rather than to be linked carnally in the first [non-]marriage.” There is no real problem or perplexity here, declares Richard, for the truth of the matter is clear. In this special case, it is not sinful to disobey the Church, and putting up with the excommunication is actually meritorious. However, he continues, a person in this situation should comport himself like an excommunicate, refraining from receiving holy communion in order to avoid scandal, particularly in that place where habitually he had done so (and where, presumably, the fact of his excommunication is known).

Here, once again, is an open admission that, in matters relating to marriage, the Church can get things badly wrong. As Richard says in an earlier *quaestio*, in the court of conscience and of God (who knows the inner secrets of men’s hearts) true inner consent is required for marriage; however, the Church Militant must judge by exterior things.¹³⁷ If a man and a woman say the words which are normally expressive of interior consent, even though in truth this is not really present, then a marriage is deemed to have been made—unless, of course, it can be proved by evident signs that interior consent is lacking. Richard freely admits that proving this is difficult indeed. “At the minute nothing occurs to me as to how this might be possible.”

I have dwelt on the agonizings of Aquinas and Richard of Middleton at some length for various reasons. In general terms, they support the thesis which is one of the major claims of this present book, that “orthodoxy” should not be regarded as a monolithic and determined structure which is devoid of contradiction, contestation,

and downright confusion (though, admittedly, when the heresy-hunt was on, individual freedom of maneuver could become heavily restricted). More particularly, marriage was seen as the most chaotic of all the holy sacraments and human institutions, a range of difficulties and matters of uncertainty being widely admitted. *Sit humanitus et saepe infundabiliter instituta*. . . Here the orthodox road was neither straight nor narrow, and even pillars of the ecclesiastical establishment were willing to risk remarks which seem surprisingly frank, perhaps even shocking. It was not only Lollards such as John Purvey who recognized the inadequacy of certain existing legal practices and were attracted by the notion that, ideally, men and women should be governed by their own consciences and interior feelings. The crucial difference lies in the extent to which Wyclif and Purvey were willing to push the issues, the strength of their belief in the insufficiency of standard legal practice and the degree of their outrage that men were being inhibited from following their inner convictions. Wyclif—or at least Wyclif's opinionated Phronesis—complains loudly about the *status quo* without offering any practical suggestions as to how matters might be improved. In place of Richard of Middleton's resigned admission that the Church can do nothing other than judge by appearances, by what men say and do rather than what they feel inside, Wyclif identifies the hand of Antichrist in the corruption of some (nebulously defined) state in which things were better and discovers devilish agency in the obstruction of spiritual counseling of a kind—it would have to be a quite extraordinary kind—which would enable the rule of conscience to operate more effectively in the future. The dissemination of such ideas among layfolk¹³⁸ does not seem to have brought any increased address of the practical issues, to judge by the doctrine of the East Anglian Lollards, with its utter reliance on “consent in hert” (evidently deriving from Wyclif's own elevation of *verbum mentis* over *verbum oris* and concomitant denigration of the priestly role in the “ornamentation” of marriage). The notion that neither a verbal contract nor a public manifestation (such as the calling of banns and church solemnization) was required for the making and affirmation of a marriage sounds like a recipe for social disaster.

In the representative disquisitions of Thomas Aquinas and Richard of Middleton, what is true about marriage before God and in the consciences of men and women is set against what church marriage courts must do because they have to keep to the external evidence. In heterodox thought this widens into a major conceptual gap, with the ecclesiastical authorities being pilloried for their failure to respect the *lex conscientiae* and the divine law. Traditionally, a private marital contract made between a man and a woman was called “marriage

before God,” emphasizing “both its sacramental and its unprovable nature”; i.e., in the absence of witnesses and public church solemnization, it lacked any external verifiable features, and was “enforcable only in the internal forum of the conscience” (to borrow phrases from Shannon McSheffrey).¹³⁹ But in Wycliffite thought, the meaning of “marriage before God” has drastically changed, the notion having taken on new force and authority. One kind of policing (that of the church courts) has been replaced with another, even more powerful (indeed omnipotent), agency, whose judgments are truly known only to an élite group. In place of the Church Militant’s (inevitable and fallible) reliance on externals as the means of judging internals now stands conformity to the values of the Wycliffite *vera ecclesia*. Only its members live and love within the correct relationship with God; therefore they alone are fit to judge whether God approves or not of their marriages—and, presumably, those of lesser mortals. These select few are above the demeaning (perhaps even devilish) legal obligation of putting their “consent of love in Jhu’ Crist” into mere *verba oris*; their convictions are not subject to the controls of a corrupt church which deals only with superficial evidence and is incapable of seeing deep into men’s hearts.

Wyclif himself never worked out his views of marriage to this extent— but here, I believe, is their logical conclusion, a conclusion adumbrated in (for example) the recorded views of William White’s followers. The Lollard elevation of inner consent above all else may seem, at first sight, attractive, inasmuch as it seems to suggest that men and women should be guided by their innermost affections, follow what they feel rather than what they had to say. But that would be to misunderstand the import of Wyclif’s doctrine. There is little, if any, room therein for the fragile, fleeting, and sometimes hopeless desires of the human “hert,” as depicted so movingly by Chaucer the love poet, and we could hardly be farther from the Keatsian notion of the holiness of the heart’s affections. Judgment concerning the rights and wrongs of personal relationships has been placed in the hands of God’s chosen people, whose righteous, predestined souls know full well how married life should be conducted.¹⁴⁰

One crucial aspect of such conduct, one may easily imagine, would have been a puritanical (or “proto-puritanical”)¹⁴¹ attitude to the matter of sexual relations between husband and wife. It is easy to infer their views concerning sex within the married state.¹⁴² Netter did not have to do much imagining in respect of one relevant issue: he was quite convinced that Wyclif and his Kentish followers regarded marital sex as being permissible for one thing only, the procreation of children—the implication being that if a couple did not or could not produce offspring, then their marriage was invalid.

Netter finds in Wyclif's *Triologus* the view that, because Adam and Eve, and consequently other couples, can generate children "without crime," therefore procreation is the *quidditas* of marriage and, in order to be married legally, couples must have children or at least be able to have them.¹⁴³ Netter instantly attacks this on the grounds that this would problematize the sexless but (of course) perfectly valid marriage of Mary and Joseph.¹⁴⁴ The practice of "chaste marriage," i.e., married couples agreeing to abstain from sex), is further defended with reference to I Corinthians 7:29, where Paul speaks of men that have wives being as though they had none, i.e., abstaining from sex in the belief that the end of the world is nigh. Here the Apostle calls married men from the *officium generandi*, explains Netter, and wishes them to have wives even though they are not using them for procreation. The fact that these couples practice chastity does not dissolve their marriages, which are not lacking in terms of faith (i.e., lifelong fidelity) or sacrament, these being two of the three "marriage goods" as traditionally constituted, namely *fides*, *sacramentum*, and *proles*.¹⁴⁵ Netter is anxious not to be misunderstood here. He is not denying that *prolis propagatio* is a great marriage good. His point is rather that children are a *bonum circumstantionale matrimonii*, i.e., a "circumstantial" good arising out of marriage, but not part of its very essence. Therefore the lack of children does not invalidate a marriage.¹⁴⁶

But English novelty-lovers disagree with this, Netter exclaims, drawing attention to certain dubious goings-on in Kent, where "modern errors" (*modernis erroribus*) are secretly breaking out. Certain people there say that if after three years a couple haven't had children, e.g., because either partner has some deformity or is too old or past the age of childbearing, then the marriage must be dissolved. Wyclif himself supports this view, Netter continues, in view of the emphasis that his definition of marriage places on *procreatio prolis*. Furthermore, in Wyclif's *Triologus* Phronesis had said, "it seems to me a probable opinion (*probabile*), that those who cannot procreate carnally are, in a certain way, joined together unlawfully."¹⁴⁷ Therefore old people, who in the past married because they wanted worldly goods, or through hope of mutual sexual pleasure, or as a means of excusing desire even though they had no hope of having children, are not truly joined together in marriage. The same applies to young people who are "not suitable for marriage"—presumably because they have not yet reached child-generating age. In Wyclif's view, Netter concludes, those who carnally join together in this way are fornicating, committing mortal sin.¹⁴⁸

Netter then robustly denies the suggestion that if people marry without any hope of having a child (*desperatio prolis*), or not having

propagation as their principal intention (*intentio principalis*) in marrying, they are acting without excuse or justification.¹⁴⁹ Most certainly, St. Paul does not support this proposition; on the contrary, he says that people can marry as a means of controlling and containing their sexual impulses. "For fear of fornication, let every man have his own wife: and let every woman have her own husband" (I Corinthians 7:2). If the unmarried and widows cannot contain themselves, "let them marry. For it is better to marry than to burn" (vv. 8 and 9). Nothing about the necessity of having children may be found in the Apostle's words, Netter points out. Paul does not say "everyone should have his wife on account of the generation of children." Although they may despair of having children, people may wish to marry in accord with the *indulgentia* or pardon described by the Apostle.¹⁵⁰ As Augustine says, marriage protects from the sins of adultery and fornication a couple who "have sexual intercourse even without the purpose of procreation, although evil habits impel them to such intercourse. . . . For this is not permitted because of the marriage, but because of the marriage it is pardoned."¹⁵¹ Marriage was indeed first instituted (in the Garden of Eden) for the procreation of children, but subsequently it became a remedy for lechery.¹⁵² Netter's zeal in pursuing Wyclif for (allegedly) reducing marriage to *propagatio polis* (what I propose to call the "propagationist" justification of marriage) has led him into an admittedly limited but nevertheless compelling defense of marital sex for purposes other than the generation of children.

A rather strange position for a schoolman to find himself in. And it must be admitted that Netter is more at home in defending the validity of the marriages of barren and/or elderly people in whom "the ardor of the flesh has disappeared" though "the order of charity nevertheless flourishes."¹⁵³ That is what he proceeds to do, in the following chapter of his *Doctrinale*. Netter cannot be credited with any "liberalism" in matters sexual, if the anachronism may be permitted. But the tendency (as he identified it) in Wyclif's thought to make the production of children part of the *quidditas* of marriage goes far beyond what he could stomach, or what the powerful *auctoritates* he cites were able to support. Therefore it is, I believe, quite reasonable to identify this exceptionally narrow view of marital sexuality as one of the many factors which made the Lollard sect "proto-puritanical," to borrow a term from Dyan Elliott, who has found here a reason why anti-Lollard polemic "rarely ran" to accusations of "sexual immorality."¹⁵⁴

There are, to be sure, a few exceptions to this rule—most if not all of which are, I believe, ideologically interconnected with the very recommendations for the bridling of desire which have been described

above (strange as it may seem). The pattern formed by the key ideas may be sketched as follows. If priests and female religious are married, their lusts may be controlled and contained—and homosexuality prevented. Indeed (and here we may detect Lollard distaste for “private religion”)¹⁵⁵ the married state is *more* pleasing to God than that of chastity. And the prime obligation of married couples is to bring forth children—this being in accord with Wyclif’s “propagationist” rationale for marriage. Interconnections of such elements appear in the Norwich trial records; for example, Edmund Archer admitted that “Y have holde, beleved and affermed that chastite of monkes, chanons, freres, noones, prestes and of any other persones is not commendable ne meritorie, but it is more commendable and more plesyng unto God al suche persones to be wedded and bringe forth frute of hare bodyes.”¹⁵⁶ Behind this (one may infer) lies the doctrine of William White, *presbyter uxoratus* (as Netter contemptuously called him).¹⁵⁷ White probably contributed also to the Kentish outbreak of “modern errors” which so horrified Netter. But Edmund Archer’s views find parallels elsewhere in England, and indeed in Ricardian England, as when the layman William of Ramsbury (tried by the Bishop of Salisbury in 1389) claimed that “it is permitted to whatsoever priest and any other individual to know carnally whatsoever women—whether nuns, virgins, or wives—and this is for the sake of the multiplication of the human race.”¹⁵⁸ The paradox is rich. Lollard views concerning married priests, the restriction of sex to *propagatio prolis*, and indeed the priesthood of all believers (“every good Cristen man is a good prest”),¹⁵⁹ have come together to constitute what looks like a license for promiscuity—an unfortunate instance of joined-up-thinking which would no doubt have horrified those many followers of Wyclif who were more devout (and better-informed) than William of Ramsbury.¹⁶⁰ (Indeed, William might well be deemed a caricature of a Wycliffite believer.)¹⁶¹ Significantly, Edmund Archer restricts the work of propagation to *married* couples, those that “be wedded,”¹⁶² and there are no grounds for fantasizing about Hawisia Moone, Margery Baxter, John Skylly, John Godesell, and other members of the East Anglian group engaging in partner-swapping or group sex, “for the sake of the multiplication of the human race.” The proto-puritanical cast of Lollardy was firm and solidly established, and there is every reason to believe that it extended to sexual matters.

Au contraire, Chaucer’s Wife of Bath offers a quite outrageous celebration of sex within (and without) marriage, an unbridling of desire which would have scandalized many of the Lollards whose views we have reported above. “Chaucer wished to gain a hearing for Lollard views via the Wife,” claims Alcuin Blamires.¹⁶³ But, had

Chaucer really wished to gain a hearing for Lollard views, the Wife seems the last mouthpiece he would have chosen. No self-respecting Lollard would have heard her out. Indeed, it is quite possible to read the *Wife of Bath's Prologue* as an assault on proto-puritanical views concerning marital sexuality. Of course, distrust of marital sex was not confined to the Lollards, as a reading of (for instance) Peter Lombard's *auctoritates* on the subject makes abundantly clear. However, particularly in view of Netter's attack on Wyclif's "propagationist" rationale for marriage, it seems reasonable to posit an extreme position in Lollardy ideology concerning the status of sex within the making and living-out of marriage. And Chaucer's Wife of Bath brazenly celebrates the opposite extreme.

Only for Amorous Love

In his *Legend of Good Women* Chaucer elevated material marriage to the controlling position occupied by spiritual marriage (with Christ as the bridegroom) in the legends of female saints. Here the formulae of present and future consent occasionally appear, and can function in significant ways; in these tales of broken promises it is hardly surprising that specious *verba de futuro* predominate.¹⁶⁴ But Chaucer makes no major issue of those formulae, and in search of his most substantial statements about marriage we must turn to texts like the *Merchant's Tale* and, of course, the *Wife of Bath's Prologue and Tale*. At the outset it may be said that Wycliffite marriage theory (insofar as I have managed to access and explain it) is very far from the Wife of Bath's embodiment of female sexual desire. There is no trace of the two relevant Lollard propositions which "Lollard Knight" Sir Lewis Clifford sent to Archbishop Arundel in 1401, viz. that clerical celibacy was not ordained by God and hence all in religion can marry, and that consent alone is required for marriage.¹⁶⁵ Alisoun is neither attacking clerical celibacy nor setting up marriage as a remedy for sodomy nor calling in question the vows of chastity or continence made (and kept) by certain virtuous women.

Virginitee is greet perfeccion,
And continence eek with devocion . . . (III(D) 105–6)

She speaks respectfully enough of such individuals, while emphasizing that their vows are not for her: "that am nat I" (112). Neither is she interested in the different forms of marriage contract. Her own marriages were utterly orthodox, it seems; she had her five husbands "at chirche dore" (6) where, one may presume, she married securely with words of present consent said in the presence of witnesses. There is, I believe, genuine innovation in Chaucer's text—but innovation of a kind very different from that offered by the inchoate Lollard theology

of marriage.

However, any investigation of Chaucer's *makynge* of marriage is bedeviled by the fact that, as Norman Blake puts it, the *Wife of Bath's Prologue* is arguably "the most altered piece" in the entire *Canterbury Tales*,¹⁶⁶ and many of those changes bear directly on the force of Alisoun's sexual desire and the ways in which she exercises and justifies it. No fewer than six crucial passages do not appear in all the earliest manuscripts,¹⁶⁷ including (the most demeaning of all) this shocking admission by Alisoun of a grossly indiscriminating sexual appetite:

"I ne loved nevere by no discrecioun
But evere folwede myn appetit,
Al were he short, or long, or blak, or whit;
I took no kep, so that he liked me,
How poore he was, ne eek of what degree" (III(D) 622–26)

Those controversial passages, in the view of Beverly Kennedy, "transform what would otherwise be a thoroughly ambiguous representation of her sexual morality into one which leaves no doubt of her immoral behaviour."¹⁶⁸ While I admire this wake-up call concerning the shifting nature of the *Wife's Prologue* (we do tend to put too much trust in the stability of the *Riverside Chaucer's* text), I would question Kennedy's belief that their removal in some way restores "thorough ambiguity" to the representation of Alisoun's sexual morality.

There was, Kennedy affirms, a "huge moral difference between committing acts of adultery (a mortal sin) and marrying five times (no sin at all so long as one remains faithful to each spouse)."¹⁶⁹ But many misogynistic discourses fail to recognize such a distinction; both these types of action are frequently taken as evidence of the lustful ways of women. It was not just the "Victorians" who "regarded serial marriage as tantamount to promiscuity";¹⁷⁰ similar views are expressed in the *Adversus Jovinianum*, and recalled by the Wife of Bath in her very attempt to refute them. The textual legacy of Jerome—and of Jean de Meun, on whom more below—weighs more heavily in Chaucer's text than any cultural tolerance concerning remarriage which may have been current in Chaucer's England.¹⁷¹

Underlying a crucial part of Kennedy's argument seems to be an assumption that lasciviousness within marriage (or before marriage) is less reprehensible than adultery. The more she can confine Alisoun's sexual escapades within her relationships with the men she married, the more "morally ambiguous" Chaucer's construction turns out to be. But the poet was fully aware of the doctrine that marriage cannot justify and excuse sexual desire totally; old January's belief to the contrary is one of his many delusions:

It is no fors how longe that we pleye;
In trewe wedlok coupled be we tweye,
And blessed be the yok that we been inne,
For in oure actes we mowe do no synne.
A man may do no synne with his wyf,
Ne hurte hymselfen with his owene knyf,
For we han leve to pleye us by the law. (IV(E) 1835–41)

The specious nature of this argument is made crystal-clear by this comparable passage from William of Nassington's *Speculum vitae*:

. . . when a man thurgh fole wille
With his awen wyf a dede wil wirke
Yat es forboden thurgh Halykirke,
Or vnkyndely dose any outrage
Agayne ye order of maryage,
A ful greef synne yan dose he
Thurgh whilk he may dampned be.
*For als a man yat hates his lyf
May sla himself with his awen knyf
Right so a man thurgh lust of body
With his awen wyf may synne dedely.*
Yarefore men suld do nane outrage
Bot folwe ye order of maryage,
And fare noght als a beste thurgh wille
Yat knawes nouthir wytte ne skille. (9328–42. Italics mine)¹⁷²

Of course a man can hurt, even kill, himself with his own knife. And he can harm, even spiritually kill, himself with his own wife. If a couple “assemble oonly for amorous love,” and “accomplice thilke brennyngel delit” at will, then they are committing “synne dedely.”¹⁷³ This is what Chaucer himself says in the text we know as the *Parson's Tale*.¹⁷⁴ Indeed, in his copy of Jerome's *Adversus Jovinianum* Chaucer would have read the unequivocal statement that the man who loves his wife too ardently is an adulterer: *Adulterest . . . in suam uxorem amator ardentior*. Jerome proceeds to quote Seneca to the effect that “too much love” of one's own wife is “shameful.” “A wise man ought to love his wife with judgment, not affection (*affectus*).”¹⁷⁵ Let him control his impulses and not be borne headlong into copulation. Nothing is fouler than to love a wife like an adultress.”¹⁷⁶

Here Chaucer came into contact with statements that for several centuries remained at the very center of theological discussion of marital sex, particularly since this material from Jerome was incorporated into the fourth book of Peter Lombard's *Libri sententiarum*¹⁷⁷ and hence received the attention of generation after generation of its commentators. The Lombard himself concluded that if a couple engage in sexual intercourse for the sake of offspring (*causa proles*), then their coupling is free from blame (*sic excusatur coitus ut culpam non habeat*); however, if they are motivated by unbridled desire, then they fall into sin. As Marcia Colish says, the Lombard is emphatic that sex engaged in purely for pleasure is “no better than

fornication”—or, indeed, adultery.¹⁷⁸ Commenting on the *Sentences*, Aquinas had complicated matters by declaring that “pleasure in a good action is good, and pleasure in an evil action, evil; wherefore, as the marriage act is not evil in itself, neither will it always be a mortal sin to seek pleasure therein.”¹⁷⁹ Consequently “the right answer” to the question of marital pleasure is that it should not be sought in such a way as to exclude the honesty of marriage. If a man uses his wife not as his wife but merely as a woman, then he falls into mortal sin: “such a man is said to be too ardent a lover of his wife, because his ardour carries him away from the goods of marriage” (namely, *fides*, *sacramentum*, and *proles*, as discussed above). “If, however, he seeks pleasure within the bounds of marriage, so that it would not be sought in another than his wife, it is a venial sin.”¹⁸⁰ Clearly, then, the role of the marriage goods is vital: sexual union cannot be made “ordinate” without them; they afford crucial compensations “which excuse marriage and make it right.”¹⁸¹

The matter was further complicated by the notion of the “marriage debt” which the couple owed each other as a legal obligation. This debt was reciprocal, the woman having as much power over the man as the man had over her. Medieval discourse on this topic took its lead from St. Paul: “The wife hath not power of her own body: but the husband. And in like manner the husband also hath not power of his own body: but the wife” (I Corinthians 7:4). Here, then, was “one of the very few areas of equality between husband and wife” before the law.¹⁸² Chaucer’s Wife of Bath seems well aware of that fact:

“I have the power duryng al my lyf
Upon his propre body, and noght he.
Right thus the Apostel tolde it unto me. . .” (III(D) 158–60)

“Men . . . inhir bookes” have set down the principle that “man shal yelde to his wyf hire dette,” and of course this involves sex, the husband being obliged to employ his “sely instrument” appropriately (129–32). Aquinas, following Augustine, had affirmed that if couples come together “in order to pay the debt” of marriage this action may be deemed free of sin.¹⁸³ *Reddere debitum coniugale nullius est criminis*.¹⁸⁴ Little wonder that Alisoun should seize on the notion of conjugal debt with enthusiasm. But she enjoys paying, and being paid, rather too much.

The body of doctrine thus generated by the professional theologians moved into pastoral compilations of the kind drawn upon by Chaucer for his *Parson’s Tale*, and also into vernacular treatises like *Dives and Pauper*, which identifies no fewer than eight ways in which a man may sin “meddlyng with his wif,” the first in the list being, “3if he medle with hyr only to fulfyllyn his lust & his lecherie, takyng non hede to God ne to þe honeste of matrimonye.”¹⁸⁵ It is also represented

in Eustache Deschamps's *Miroir de mariage*, which Chaucer may have known.¹⁸⁶ Dechamps includes the *sententia* that the man who loves his wife in an excessive, "disorderly" manner, actually commits adultery with her.

Nulle chose n'est plus amere
Que ta femme comme adultere
Amer desordonnément. (5403–5)¹⁸⁷

Such statements (quite typically) view the situation from the man's point of view, but of course the same moral imperatives apply to the female of the species. The Wife of Bath loves too ardently, and in her life-story sexual assembly "oonly for amorous love" features largely. She is right to say that "to be wedded is no sinne" (III(D) 51). But wedlock does not take away the taint of sin from everything that is done within it, particularly those "actes" of marriage (cf. l. 144) that seem to be Alisoun's main interest in the sacrament and institution.

Like the Nun's Priest's Chauncleer, Alisoun is a servant of Venus ("goddesse of plesaunce") insofar as she labors "Moore for delit than world to multiplye" (VII(B2) 3345): and this despite her early invocation of the divine injunction at Genesis 1:28 to "be fruitful and multiply" (*Crescite et multiplicami*) and the emphasis she places on the fact that the sexual "membres" were made for the purpose of "generacioun" as well as for "purgacioun / Of uryne" (III(D) 28, 120–21). Of any progeny she may have produced within any of her liaisons, we hear nothing. In terms of the cultural norms then prevailing, her advocacy of marriage (or, more accurately, highly selective aspects of it) was no excuse for a long and loud history of a life of self-gratification,¹⁸⁸ indecorous reference to sexual organs together with use of ostentatious euphemisms (which draw attention to, rather than obscure, their referents),¹⁸⁹ and shocking battles of the sexes in which uppity females win sovereignty over inadequate males. In short, Chaucer's "first clerical readers" did not need to "rewrite" the Wife of Bath "in conformity with clerical antifeminism";¹⁹⁰ that was, in large measure, how Chaucer himself had written her. Even if all of the disputed passages were to be removed from the *Wife of Bath's Prologue* (and among modern editors only Norman Blake has been prepared to go that far), many—apparently quite authentic—others remain which unambiguously affirm the force of her sexual desire. That remains a highly suspect emotion, which marriage must accommodate in some way, but does not, cannot, make "siker ynogh" with "hoolynesse" (to borrow a phrase from the *Merchant's Tale*, IV(E) 1708).

Here, then, is where the originality of the Wife of Bath's "theology of marriage" may be found, and quite radical it is too. But it is not radical in the direction in which Wycliffite thought about marriage

had moved. This claim will now be further substantiated by contrasting the ways in which Genesis 1:28 (“Be fruitful and multiply”) and the issue of multiple marriage is addressed by Alisoun and within a Lollard interpretive context. For a start, it may be noted that Alisoun’s application of *Crescite et multiplicami* is highly selective; she manages to use it to justify “amorous love” without reference to progeny—quite a casuistical feat, given the force of the literal sense of the text, and the conventional doctrine that it is the *propagatio prolis* which justifies (insofar as that is possible) the *amor*. Here this *auctoritee* has its waxen nose wrenched in a highly unusual direction. Wycliffite application of the same divine command, in respect of issues relating to sexual continence and marriage, seems quite different, insofar as we are able to judge this given the paucity of the surviving evidence.¹⁹¹ In the Norwich heresy trials we find examples of the heretical belief that “chastite of prestes seculer and reguler is not commendable ne meritorie, but it is more meritorie, leful and commendable alle prestes to take tham wyves and alle nunnes to take thaym husbondes and bringe forth frute of her bodyes.”¹⁹² *Crescite et multiplicami* may easily be imagined as a supporting *auctoritas* for this proposition. Roger Dymmok makes the connection explicit. Responding to the eleventh of the Wycliffite *Twelve Conclusions* (as quoted above), he claims that Lollards use the text “Be fruitful and multiply” to attack female vows of chastity, which, they say, obstruct women’s natural inclinations and bodily functions.¹⁹³ Dymmok immediately trivializes the argument by claiming that unscrupulous people use it to deceive simple souls and uneducated women, leading them into sin.¹⁹⁴

At the same point Dymmok attributes to Lollards the belief that wives should be held in common, a practice which God abhors. This appears to be an inference of Dymmok’s, since no justification of the communality of wives actually appears in the Wycliffite text, which limits itself to disparaging vows of continence and recommending marriage for nuns and widows. However, it may be noted that the East Anglian Lollard William Colyn was accused of believing “quod omnes mulieres deberent esse communes.”¹⁹⁵ Here, albeit reductively, matters are implicated which had been discussed at some length in commentaries on the *Sentences*: can a man be married to several wives at one and the same time, can one and the same woman have many husbands simultaneously, and should wives be held in common, on the grounds of social cohesion? St. Thomas Aquinas was perfectly willing to admit that “plurality of wives neither wholly destroys nor in any way hinders the first end of marriage,” which is the begetting and rearing of children, “since one man is sufficient to get children of several wives, and to rear the children born of them.”¹⁹⁶ However, he

then argues that such a practice would hinder considerably the second end of marriage, which is life lived within the community in an orderly way, with married couples being faithful to one another. Here Aquinas takes as his authority the eighth book of Aristotle's *Ethics*, where "the Philosopher" had investigated the principles of good family relationships (with a view to their possible importance for the wider community).¹⁹⁷ The influence of the second book of the *Politics* is also evident, when Aquinas states that "There cannot easily be peace in a family where several wives are joined to one husband," because one husband cannot satisfy the demands of many wives, and strife will ensue as the wives quarrel among themselves.¹⁹⁸ Furthermore, plurality of wives completely destroys the third end, whereby marriage signifies the union of Christ and the Church, because "just as Christ is one, so also is the Church one" and any idea of plurality is therefore unacceptable.

It was widely accepted that, under the Old Law, many patriarchs had taken several wives, apparently without divine disapproval. Aquinas was able to justify this situation, while denying that it affords any precedent for present-day practice, on the grounds that "human actions inevitably vary according to the various conditions of persons, times, and other circumstances." Because at that time God wished "to ensure the multiplication of the offspring to be brought up" in His worship, through a special dispensation he allowed multiple marriage to men. In any case, plurality of wives is not against the first, core precepts of Natural Law.¹⁹⁹ In contrast, plurality of husbands most certainly is—largely because of the consequences for the upbringing of children, Aquinas explains. Children would not know who their fathers were, yet they depend on paternal care for their education. Therefore "the marriage of one wife with several husbands has not been sanctioned by any law or custom."²⁰⁰ What's sauce for the goose is not, it would seem, sauce for the gander.

The same sorts of argument appear in rejections of the doctrine of the communality of wives, as may be illustrated from the vivid account, as provided by the English Carmelite John Baconthorpe, of the dire social disruption which that practice would cause.²⁰¹ He too draws on Book viii, chapter 12 of Aristotle's *Ethics*, in arguing that man, as a rational creature, does not want to generate offspring solely for the multiplication of the species, as brute animals do, but also wishes to live well with his wife, in peaceful association and conversation. But such a situation would be impossible if he had many wives—for then his life would be fraught with quarreling and contention. Aristotle proves this, Baconthorpe continues, in the second book of his *Politics*, where he argues against Socrates, who fallaciously believed that wives and possessions should be held in common, in

order to achieve unity within the city. The truth of the matter is that unity begins at home and between individual humans. Communal wives would constantly be fought over, with the strong oppressing the weak. If one and the same woman was the wife of the father, the sons, and the brother, dissension would be inevitable. The consequences for child-rearing would be equally calamitous. No-one could say of any of the children, “this is mine,” because it would be the child of ten thousand fathers. The care of particular children would not be anyone’s particular responsibility; one wouldn’t know what was his own, and what to value as his own. In short, holding wives in common is a recipe for division rather than cohesion. Far from encouraging amity, as Socrates thought, this practice would diminish it, just as when a small amount of sweetening is mixed with a lot of water. Baconthorpe is following Aristotle verbatim.²⁰²

From discussions like these we may infer the irresponsible views that Dymmok wished to foist upon the Lollards. He is uninterested in the ideological basis of their questioning of orthodox ideals of continence; rather his aim is to demean his opponents’ motives with the suggestion that they are seeking to satisfy their own lusts by bedding gullible women. Such an account of Lollard attitudes sits awkwardly with the reluctance of Wyclif and Purvey to allow sexual intercourse a significant role in the making of marriage, and with Wyclif’s narrowly “procreationist” rationale for the institution, as investigated above. It is also difficult to square with the recommendations of marriage for clerics and religious women which appear (for example) in *Of Weddid Men and Wifis*, the third and eleventh of the *Twelve Conclusions*, and the Norwich trial records. Those recommendations are hardly an inducement to promiscuity—rather their concern is to control and normalize desire, by having it flow down a relatively safe channel. Dubious characters such as William of Ramsbury (whose indiscriminate eagerness to multiply the species was discussed above) can hardly be taken as representative, and I cannot believe that they did much, if anything, to disrupt the proto-puritanical character of demotic Lollardy—to which, I believe, the words and deeds of the Wife of Bath, as carefully constructed by Chaucer, are diametrically opposed.

There is no evidence that mainstream Lollardy ever advocated holding wives in common—but, of course, Dymmok was not interested in being fair to his opponents. At any rate, the Wife of Bath’s views on the subject remain well within the bounds of orthodoxy. She is well aware of the fact that patriarchs like Abraham and Jacob had taken several wives—

I woot wel Abraham was an hooly man,
And Jacob eek, as ferforth as I kan;

And ech of hem hadde wyves mo than two,
And many another holy man also. (III(D) 55–58)

—but she does not use this in arguing that she, too, should be allowed to have several spouses at one and the same time. The conventional wisdom that, while multiple marriage is allowable (in certain circumstances) to men it is certainly not to women (as illustrated above from Aquinas’s contribution), is left uncontested. For her multiple marriage means marriage *seriatim*. Each of Alisoun’s husbands is safely dead before she marries another, and she reiterates orthodox doctrine concerning bigamy:

. . . nys it no reprove
To wedde me, if that my make dye,
Withouten excepcion of bigamy. (84–86)²⁰³

Furthermore, the Wife fully and freely accepts (“I graunte it wel”) that “maydenhede” and “virginitie” are “more parfit” than marriage (91–92, 95–96). She is definitely not in the business of suggesting that virgins and continent women have taken unnatural vows which they should break. For her, the imperative *Crescite et multiplicami* applies only to married couples; there is no implication whatever in her prologue or tale that priests, nuns, and widows vowed to chastity should participate in “the actes and in fruyt of mariage” (114).

This clear position decisively separates her from Lollard theology of marriage—and, indeed, from the views of Jovinian (as reported and refuted by Jerome) which, according to Thomas Netter, had much in common with those of one of his own arch-adversaries, William White. The crucial passage may be quoted in full:

William White tentatively proceeds to inquire amongst the Apostles, and in the end he concludes that they were almost all married, and argues that after their Apostolate (even though this isn’t written down) they could have gone back to their wives, in the same way as they could have gone back to their job of fishing. He gets this [opinion] from Jovinian. . .²⁰⁴

It is unclear whether Netter is reporting White’s own use of the relevant opinion of Jovinian, as culled from Jerome’s *Adversus Jovinianum*, or himself making the connection. At any rate, Netter then cites Jerome’s forceful refutation of the way in which Jovinian had attempted to defend, with reference to apostolic marriage, his conviction that virgins and wives are equal in God’s sight. The Saint had accepted that, before the crucifixion of Christ consecrated the Gospel by His passion and by His blood, Peter and other Apostles did indeed have wives; he was willing to concede that much to Jovinian. However, Jerome continues, the Apostles took those wives before they knew the Gospel, and, once they were received into the Apostolate, they forsook the offices of marriage. When Peter, representing the Apostles, said to the Lord, “Lo we have left all and followed thee”

(Matthew 19:17), the Lord answered him, “Verily I say unto you, there is no man that hath left house or wife, or brethren, or parents, or children for the kingdom of God’s sake, who shall not receive manifold more in this time, and in the world to come eternal life” (Luke 18:29). This promised reward comprises a very good reason why present-day priests should be celibate.

For all of Chaucer’s elaborately playful engagements with Jerome, he keeps the Wife of Bath well clear of the extreme views of Jovinian, and ensures she does not say anything which supports the ancient heretic in any significant way. True, Chaucer has Alisoun disruptively assert that we shouldn’t be ashamed that God, in his wonderful purpose, created the genitalia for the purpose of generation:²⁰⁵

Telle me also, to what conclusion
Were membres maad of generacion,
And of so parfit wys a [wright] ywrought?
Trusteth right wel, they were nat maad for noght. (III(D) 115–18)²⁰⁶

But she is careful to insist that mere possession of a “sely instrument”—the sexual organs being common possessions of all human beings—does not mean that one is *obliged* to use it “for engendrure” (cf. 116, 128, 132, 134). This is well seen by the example of Jesus Christ Himself:

Crist was a mayde and shapen as a man,
And many a seint, sith that the world bigan;
Yet lyved they evere in parfit chastitee. (139–41)

At this point Chaucer is directly drawing on, and fully supporting, Jerome, who had followed this acknowledgment of Christ’s physical form with the question, as framed by a person like Jovinian who would oppose his celebration of chastity, “What necessity was there for Him to be born with members which He was not going to use?”²⁰⁷ Likewise with Saint Paul: “Why are you like other men, Paul? Why are you distinguished from the female sex by a beard, hair, and other peculiarities of person? . . . To no purpose you have all these manly qualities, if you forego the embraces of women.” By the same token, why “should a widow persevere in chastity,” or “what harm does it do me if another man lies with my wife?” To accept such arguments would be to hold that we were “only born to live like beasts.” Jerome’s heavy irony is intended to underline the point that it would be quite ridiculous for us to indulge our lusts “for fear that we may have members of this kind for nothing.”

The Wife of Bath’s deviation from Jerome does not take that path. Far from adopting the *persona* of one who opposes the Saint’s celebration of chastity, Alisoun emphasizes that she does not “envye . . . virginitee” (III(D) 142) and has nothing to say against it. Those who

seek to live perfectly have their “estaat.” But—and here is the point at which she parts company from her authoritative source—Alisoun also has hers:

In swich estaat as God hath cleped us [i.e., “us wyves”]
I wol persevere; I nam nat precius.
In wyfhod I wol use myn instrument
As frely as my Makere hath it sent. (147–50)

Her sexual “instrument” is a generous gift from God, and she will bestow that same gift generously on others. The fact that Christ and St. Paul did not put their “membres” to sexual use does not mean that she is similarly constrained. “Wyfhod” is the vocation to which God has called the Wife of Bath (cf. the idiom “cleped us” at l. 147), and she will not be found wanting in the performance of its arduous (!) duties. On one of Eustace of Arras’s arguments, the status of married women was diminished because they belonged to the “common state of women” (cf. p. 196 above). In the Wife of Bath’s argument, the lot of the “common” woman has been elevated and wives given (so to speak) a proper job, which involves diligent performance of the sexual act. For, as already noted, Chaucer’s construction of the “estaat” of “wyfhod,” while using arguments which traditionally defended marriage with reference to the begetting and rearing of children, contrives to make minimal reference to the former and no reference at all to the latter, and fails to comment on Alisoun’s achievements (or lack thereof) as a multiplier of the species. First and foremost, then, she stands as an advocate of “amorous love,” mainly—though not exclusively—within marriage.²⁰⁸

Is this not outrageous, a hyperbole so blatant that it can be laughed off? Of course it is. The Wife herself says that her “entente nys but for to pleye” (III(D) 172–73, 192). In particular, her promotion of female desire may be read as an amusing mock-disputation of the type wherein an inherently ridiculous proposition is defended with great vigor and learning—an elaborate academic joke of the type found, in far simpler form, in the *Summoner’s Tale*. There is a safety-valve, a failsafe button, in the *Wife of Bath’s Prologue*. Just as the Nun’s Priest reminds his audience that his “tale is of a cok” (VII(B2) 3252) and therefore shouldn’t be taken too seriously, so it may be said that Alisoun cannot conceal her close relationship with the stereotype of the sexually rapacious widow (which will be treated in the following chapter-section). That relationship pulls her character in the direction of cultural normalization, severely diminishing any threat she may present.

But such a reading fails to satisfy. When the Friar urges the Wife of Bath to speak merely of “game,” his uneasiness indicates that her performance went far beyond that. Chaucer was not prepared to leave

the school-matter to the experts. And part of that school-matter consisted of debate on the role of sexual desire in the making of, and within, marriage. Here Lollard thought was antipathetic to him (or, at least, to his construct the Wife of Bath), and, while (I believe) his text discloses some awareness of anti-Lollard polemic on the subject, it is rather the *Adversus Jovinianum* which affords his focal point. Chaucer has Alisoun claim the license of disputation (*disputandi licentia*), in itself a daring thing to attribute to a female character, as she engages with Saint Jerome in a way which, while turning many of his arguments upside-down, is careful to reaffirm others, and certainly does not offer any succor to Jovinian—whose views had acquired a dangerous topicality in Chaucer's time, to judge from Netter's association of the ancient heretic with the new one, William White. Furthermore, debate on the unstable human matter of marriage had become controversial in certain areas of inquiry—I have particularly in mind the issues raised by Purvey and Wyclif's Phronesis—which were beside Chaucer's point, to judge by their absence from his narrative of the Wife of Bath. But *in toto* the corpus of Wycliffite theology of marriage is small indeed. To sum up: Lollard theology, whether in Latin or in the vernacular, had little to say on the subject of marriage, and Chaucer had a lot to say—but quite different things were said.

There is no “Loller” to smell in this particular wind.

III. OLD WIVES' TALES: VETULARITY AND VIRTUE

If in the Middle Ages any collection of individuals was implicated strongly in obscene language and was perceived to be habitual offenders, that group was old women. . . . Although the matron and the matronly values she personified were lauded in ancient Rome in particular, both she and the meek little old lady of the twentieth century who is helped across the street by the Boy Scout are not characteristically medieval constructs. In the literature of the Middle Ages, the typical little old lady would either have propositioned the boy herself or else would have coached him in having his way with a girl he wanted.²⁰⁹

A basic working definition of the late-medieval notion of “obscenity” may be inferred from Giovanni de’Balbi of Genoa’s thirteenth-century Latin dictionary, the *Catholicon*. “*Obscenus*,” he explains, is made up from *ob* (on account of) and *cenum* (dirt or filth).²¹⁰ Or, he continues, it relates to *cena*, i.e., *scena*, the stage; here he is invoking an etymology that is found as early as Varro’s *De lingua Latina*.²¹¹ Yet another alternative relates to *canendo*, singing or making sound. “For *obsценus* is properly said of an utterance (*vox*, meaning a sound, word). A *vox* is obscene which is harsh and vile (*dura et turpis*),” although the term may also be said of some other thing which is impure and vile (*de alia re immunda et turpi*). The idea that things

rather than words may be termed “obscene” is reinforced by Isidore of Seville’s summary statement that the love of wives is just (*justus*), of children, pious (*pius*), and of prostitutes, obscene (*obscenus*).²¹²

This relationship between dirty words and dirty things is of crucial importance in the following discussion, which focuses on “obscene” language uttered by and about women, particularly old women, who themselves were often described as “obscene.” Chaucer’s accomplishment in the *Wife of Bath’s Prologue and Tale*, wherein an aging woman constructs an aged woman who offers moral doctrine of the highest standard, is quite remarkable given the strength of cultural prejudice against the *vetula*—seen variously as an expert in the highly dubious art of love, a corrupter of the morals of youth, a receptacle of poisonous humors, a scourge of learned clerks, and generally as the lowest form of human life. The remainder of this chapter will track the progression from *vielle* (and *veuve*) to paragon of virtue, in order to disclose the precariousness of the position occupied by the uniquely empowered “olde wyf ” who exercises moral and pedagogic dominion in Alisoun’s narrative. In the final analysis, the question must be addressed: does female corporeality—expressed by problematic bodies and problematic language about bodies—destroy or at least diminish the morality of the tale she tells? Here, then, the challenge presented by the Pardoner is recon-figured in a more complicated and compelling way.

Challenging Obscenity: From *coilles* to *bel chose*

The difficulties of identifying obscene words and implications in vernacular texts are writ large in medieval literary scholarship, with accusations of anachronistic prudery being aimed at those who balk at the (often quite spectacular) innuendoes which others see lurking behind many an innocent-seeming passage. The usual counteraccusation is that it is the innuendo-spotters who are being anachronistic, imposing modern standards of sexual humor on medieval texts and/or ignoring the philological evidence afforded by the origin, formation, derivation, and development of each and every word. However, attempts to pin down the exact connotations and effects of crucial words may be thwarted by the very different impacts they seem to make within different textual situations—and of course the possibilities of sociolinguistic analysis are severely limited by the impossibility of conducting audience-surveys to ascertain whether particular target-audiences were genuinely offended or not. All we may have to go on are signals within the texts themselves, a speaker's attitude to the words he or she uses and the ways in which another fictional character reacts to them.

Jean de Meun's part of the *Roman de la Rose* offers what is arguably the most famous reaction to a perceived obscenity in medieval vernacular literature. In the course of her account of the "golden age" in which Justice reigned—brought to an abrupt end by Jupiter's usurpation of Saturn—Lady Raison uses the dubious term *coilles*, which I here translate as "balls" to recreate the vulgar shock-effect which the poet seems to want:

. . . cui [i.e., Saturnus] Jupiter coupa les coilles,
ses filz, con se fussent andoilles,
(mout ot ci dur filz et amer)
puis les gita dedanz la mer. . . (5507–10)

[. . . Saturn, whose balls Jupiter, his hard and bitter son, cut off as though they were sausages and threw into the sea . . .]

It takes some time for her interlocutor Amant, the Lover and first-person narrator, to express shock at this word. But, over a thousand lines later, he does get around to it:

"Si ne vos tiegn pas a cortaise
quant ci m'avez coilles nomees,
qui ne sunt pas bien renomees
en bouche a cortaise puche." (6898–901)

["I do not consider you courteous when just now you named the balls to me; they are not well thought of in the mouth of a courteous girl"]²¹³

The fact that Amant addresses a young woman here is significant, given that, as Jan Ziolkowski remarks, "over the past two millennia one particular class of people has conventionally embodied modest

speech in western Europe,” i.e., “young women and especially young virgins”; one common scurrility-test has been to see if “a given word or topic . . . brings a blush to the cheeks of an innocent girl.”²¹⁴ However, a few lines later, Jean’s *cortaise puchele* unblushingly talks dirty some more, stating that “in His wonderful purpose,” God “put the generative power into the pricks and cocks” (*en coillons et en viz*; 6936–38); furthermore, “‘balls’ (*coilles*) is a good name” and she likes it, “and so, in faith, are ‘prick’ and ‘cock’” (*coillon et vit*; 7086–87).²¹⁵ Raison also defends these words as being quite appropriate. You want me to gloss (“me requierz de gloser,” 7052), she tells Amant scornfully, but why shouldn’t I designate such parts of the human anatomy directly and without obfuscation? They are the works of my Father, and therefore can be named “properly” (*proprement*; 7095, cf. 7049). This term refers to linguistic rather than moral “propriety,” reflecting the Latin distinction between speaking *proprie* (openly, explicitly, immediately, without obscurity or convolution) and *improprie* (obliquely, figuratively).²¹⁶ Raison’s point is that she is perfectly entitled to use words which are straightforwardly significative of the things to which they refer, lacking in circumlocution, metaphor—or euphemism. And this justification, in her view, covers terms like *coilles*, *coillon*, and *vit/viz*.

In the *querelle de la Rose*, Christine de Pizan forcefully argues that such language made Jean’s part of the poem obscene, and an affront to the female sex. And her later treatise *Le Livre des trois vertus* (1405) displays an acute awareness of the part language plays within the socioeconomically vulnerable position of so many women. The wise princess should avoid coarseness (*villennie*) of speech in dealing with servant-girls and others; publicly she will read “instructive books” but “those about indecency and lubricity (*deshonnesteté et de lubrece*) she will utterly hate” and refuse to have at court. “She will not permit them to be brought into the presence of any girl, female relative or woman in her court, for there is no doubt at all that the examples of good and evil influence the minds of those men or women who see or hear them.” Two classes of women are singled out for special mention, widows and the aged. Widowed women are “at the mercy of abusive language (*mauvais langage*),” and should be careful not to give cause for “defamation or slander”; “their expressions, conduct and clothing ought to be simple, modest and decent, demure and subdued.” Furthermore, the speech of the *sage femme ancienne* “ought to be entirely controlled by discretion. She must be careful that foolish, vulgar words (*foles paroles deshonnestes*) do not issue from her mouth, for foolish and crude language (*sote parole et malhonneste*) in old people is extremely ridiculous.”²¹⁷ In other words, the wise old woman should behave in a manner directly opposed to that of Jean de Meun’s

“La Vielle.”

If it was something of a surprise to find dirty words on the lips of a *cortaise puchele*, it was quite expected for them to be associated with a *femme ancienne*, as already noted. And La Vielle does not disappoint. Her main model is, of course, Dipsas, from Ovid’s *Amores*, i.8. Here the first-person narrator angrily realizes that this *vetula* is encouraging his mistress to better herself by entrapping one or more wealthy lovers. Make sure that the man who wants you is rich, and get as many presents as you can from him. At first you shouldn’t be too greedy, in case you frighten him off. However, once you have caught him, anything goes. Feel free to ask for a loan, but make sure you don’t pay it back. If someone is from a very good family but has no assets, get rid of him. Once you have caught your wealthy lover keep him interested. Don’t have sex with him every night, in case he gets tired of you. Make sure you keep several lovers in tow, Dipsas continues: for jealousy will ensure that they work hard to win you, and the more lovers you have the more profitable it is for you.²¹⁸ Jean de Meun augmented this construction with additional material from Ovid’s *Ars amatoria* and *Remedia amoris*. Keep your heart in several places, never in one, La Vielle tells the Rose’s “Fair Welcome.” Gather as many rosebuds as possible before getting old, for then men will not break down your door. Take everything and give very little. Don’t love one man alone; women who have been obsessed with one man have come to tragic ends. Feel free to deceive men, for they will try to deceive you. And so on.

Christine de Pizan was disgusted. “What reprehensible teachings are recorded in the chapter about the Old Woman!” she exclaims. “In God’s name, what can one find there but sophisticated exhortations filled with ugliness (*laidure*) and things villainous to recall?”²¹⁹ Elsewhere Christine condemns the “great dishourableness” (*grant deshonesteté*) in this passage, declaring that “one can find nothing there but total filth and vile teaching” (*toute laidure et vil ensaingnement*).²²⁰ In similar vein, Jean Gerson’s *Traité contre le Roman de la Rose* describes La Vielle as an “accursed old woman worse than the devil” who “teaches, shows and exhorts all *jeunes filles* to sell their bodies quickly and dearly without fear or shame”; according to her, they shouldn’t hesitate to abandon themselves “to every dishonour and carnal filth” (*a toutes villainnes ordures de charnalité*).²²¹

This purveyor of *toute laidure et vil ensaingnement* was a major inspiration for the Wife of Bath. Chaucer’s debt to La Vielle in particular, and negative representations of the *vetula* in general, is enormous. However, the English poet made one major change: the Wife of Bath is an aging widow-woman rather than an aged woman. The figure of the *vetula* does appear in the Wife’s tale, this being a

version of what modern scholarship has termed the “loathly damsel” narrative. Here we meet an “olde wyf,” a “fouler wight ther may no man devyse” (998–1000): presumably she could be termed *obscenus*. But in the Wife’s prologue, Chaucer diverges from Jean de Meun by presenting Alisoun as the much-married widow, with the aid of material drawn mainly from Jerome’s *Adversus Jovinianum* in the manner we have discussed above.

References to the Wife’s age are indeterminate and tend to express her long experience rather than her longevity, as when she claims to be “expert in al myn age” (III(D) 173–74, cf. 113–14), although of course the two are connected. Chaucer does say that, when she married Jankyn, Alisoun was forty years old while he was twenty (600–601). However, no indication is given of the amount of time which has passed between that event and the Canterbury pilgrimage. And this apparently precise allusion to the Wife’s age is problematized when, only a few lines later, she remarks that she was “lusty,” “faire,” “riche” and “yong”(605–6)—apparently at the time she gave Jankyn her heart, though it’s just possible that this is to be taken as a meandering harking-back to an even earlier period, when she was, or now feels she was, in her prime. According to some medieval schemes of “the ages of man” a person was deemed old at forty, and there was a deeply embedded belief that women matured and died earlier than men. However, Shulamith Shahar has warned us in putting too much literal trust in such accounts, since the Latin term *senectus* “did not have the same meaning for all the writers” in question. Indeed, it could even designate the period roughly equivalent to what nowadays we term “middle age.” But “others applied it only to the ‘middle aged’ and elderly stages,” reserving “the term *senium* for the stage of extreme old age. Still others applied the term *senectus* only to the elderly stage (again, using the term *senium* for extreme old age).” The age deemed to mark the onset of old age varied in accordance with each of the different classification systems. It could be 40—but it could also be 35, 45, 58, 69, or 72!²²²

So, then, not much help may be found in those general schemes. More revealing is the way in which Chaucer draws on material from the *Rose*, in which Jean emphasizes the age of La Vielle, to construct the Wife’s *apologia pro vita sua*. “I have at least had my fun,” La Vielle says, “however I may have been deceived.” When she thinks back “to the jolly life” that her “heart so desires,” her “thoughts are filled with delight and her “limbs with new vigour.” “What’s done is done”; it is “pointless to regret it” (12894–95, 12902–14). But it is obvious that La Vielle does harbor many bitter regrets. In contrast, when Alisoun looks back with pleasure on her youth (cf. especially III(D) 469–75), there is no gloomy recognition that life is no fun any more; true, “the

flour [flour] is goon” but she still has “the bren” (bran) to sell, and she will continue to be “right myrie” (477–79). This could be dismissed as an old woman putting the best face on things. But the difference in tone between the two characters’ recollections is marked. La Vielle regrets the tricks she missed while young, and is seeking revenge when she teaches her young pupil to “deceive men before they deceive you.” In Chaucer’s text there is no reference to how previous lovers have deceived her; indeed, the crucial passage features in Alisoun’s triumphalist account of her five husbands, prefacing her recollection of number four. The Wife of Bath is predominantly the much-married wife, whereas neither Dipsas nor La Vielle talk of husbands. They are unhealthily obsessed with the past; Alisoun looks forward to the future, the impression being given that, despite the effects and sadness of aging, she has a future to look forward to. Age, she remarks in a passage which has no precedent in the *Rose*, will envenom.

But age, allas, that al wole envenyme,
Hath me biraft my beautee and my pith. (474–75)

That could be taken as literally true, in the light of the belief (as attested by the *De secretis mulierum*) that in the bodies of old women who cannot purge their “evil humors” dangerous poisons build up; thus their glance can “poison the eyes of children lying in cradles.”²²³ But there is no evidence that the envenoming process has reached that stage in the case of the Wife of Bath.

In sum, it would seem that Alisoun is not as old as La Vielle—but we cannot clarify the matter any further. This lack of specificity about the Wife’s age helps ensure that in Chaucer’s text the emphasis is on her widowhood rather than her possible or partial vetularity. Of course, making her a widow did not necessarily make her less “obscene,” given the strong negative traditions relating to this group of women. While in medieval society at least some widows enjoyed a large measure of social and economic independence—little wonder that Christine de Pizan remarked that remarriage is “sheer folly” for “those who have already passed their youth and who are well enough off and are not constrained by poverty”²²⁴—in medieval literature they tend to be typecast as sexually overexperienced and rapacious creatures who move from one man to another in a vain attempt to slake their insatiable lusts. This tradition may be exemplified by a satiric poem with which the *Wife of Bath’s Prologue* is often compared and which we have had occasion to quote in discussing the Pardoner’s problematic sexuality, Gautier le Leu’s *La Veuve*. Here we encounter, so to speak, the *fabliau*-version of the lusts of often-married women as described with more linguistic restraint, though with evident disgust,

in Jerome's *Adversus Jovinianum*.

Gautier tells the tale of a widow who, having buried her husband, soon forgets about him as her appetites demand satisfaction:

Une dolçors al cuer li point,
Qui le soslieve contremont;
Et li doiens le resomont,
Qui desire a mangier car crue
Qui n'est de paon ne de crue
Ains est de l'andolle pendant
U les plusors sont attendant. (134–40)

[A sweet sensation pricks her heart and lifts up her spirit, and arouses in the bearded counselor under her skirts an appetite for meat, neither peacock nor crane, but that dangling sausage for which so many are eager.]²²⁵

She takes a young husband—or, as Gautier puts it, “her hairy Goliath so pricks and excites her and the fire burns so high in her that at last she succeeds in getting a man” (382–84). He soon discovers that her sexual greed is insatiable: “Lady, you have a greedy mouth in you that too often demands to be fed” (462–68).²²⁶ The Wife of Bath’s account of how she made her old husbands “pitously a-nyght. . . swynke” (202) seems quite mild by comparison, and she has no complaints about the sexual prowess of her two young husbands. Innuendo there certainly is in the *Wife of Bath’s Tale*, though its nature and extent is a matter of some controversy in contemporary criticism. But it is, I hope, uncontroversial to claim that any problematic language that may be found in the *Wife of Bath’s Prologue* is, on the whole, more subtle than what Gautier has to offer. But does that really make much difference, given that these authors are talking about basically the same thing, the forcefulness of female desire?

The answer depends on what definitions of obscenity are applied, and the following discussion must offer different answers in accordance with different definitions. If we are looking for blatantly offensive language in the tradition of Jean de Meun’s *coilles* and *vit/viz*, there seems to be little to find (or perhaps it is more accurate to say that we cannot be confident about finding it). The Middle English form which most closely approximates to *coilles* is “coylons.” It is used by the Host in his vigorous response to the Pardoner who has just singled him out as being the most enveloped in sin among the Canterbury pilgrims: “I wolde I hadde thy coillons in myn hond / In stide of reliques. . .” (VI(C) 952–53). (Here we may detect a distant echo of Raison’s declaration that, were the linguistic custom different, “balls” could denote relics and “relics” could denote balls; cf. *Roman de la Rose*, 7076–85). This is the only occasion on which the term appears in the surviving Chaucerian corpus; indeed the *Middle English Dictionary* gives only two entries for this term, the abovementioned *Pardoner’s Tale* passage and a medical discussion in Benedict Burgh’s

continuation of Lydgate's version of the *Secreta secretorum*, the *Secrees of Old Philisoffres*.²²⁷ It certainly does not appear in the mouth of the Wife of Bath. True, in the *Riverside Chaucer's* edition of the *Wife of Bath's Tale* she refers to the male genitalia as a "nether purs" (44b) and remarks that she has the mark of Mars on her face "and also in another privee place"—which is followed by a declaration of her indiscriminating appetite (622–26). However, these expressions occur in lines which do not feature in all the earliest manuscripts. John Manly and Edith Rickert argued that they are genuinely authorial, Chaucer having added them in a process of revision.²²⁸ But in Norman Blake's view it is more "satisfying" and "reasonable" to assume that "the passages were introduced by a scribe or editor during the early fifteenth century."²²⁹

The much-discussed word *queynte* occurs twice in the *Riverside Chaucer's* edition of the *Wife of Bath's Tale* ("Ye shul have queynte right ynogh at eve"; "Is it for ye wolde have my queynte allone?" III(D) 332, 444). In one manuscript, Oxford, Corpus Christi College 198, the term replaces *quonyam* in l. 608, "I hadde the beste *quoniam* myghte be." L. D. Benson, reacting against what he regarded as the excessive and often linguistically baseless quest for Chaucerian innuendo, argues that *queynte* functions as a euphemism (meaning something like "marvelous," "wonderful," "clever," or "crafty" thing)²³⁰ here and elsewhere in Middle English, as in the early fourteenth century *Sir Tristrem* ("Hir queynt abouen hir kne, / Naked þe kniȝtes knewe"; 2254–55) and indeed Chaucer's own *Miller's Tale*, where we read of how "hende Nicholas . . . caughte" Alisoun "by the queynte" (3276).²³¹ In each case, Benson believes, the author is trying to avoid the obscene word *conte*.²³² The offensive force of that term comes across particularly well in a poem found in the Lincoln Thornton manuscript, which likens inadequate husbands to the old horse "Lyarde," who has his shoes removed and is put out to pasture because he is unable to "wele drawe" any more.²³³ Any man who cannot "serve" his wife should

be geldid or he go of bathe his balloke stonys,
And pulled of his schome, and putt to the pasture. . .

The poet proceeds to fantasize about a "parke" filled with impotent men, which comes under attack from a group of friars who are incensed because one of their number (who, the park-master claims, "myghte noghte do bot once in a ȝere") has been corralled therein. No "counte betyne" (cunt-beaten, i.e., impotent) man will be their brother, they cry, and proceed to destroy the enclosure. This action does women a considerable disservice, because, having been set free, the park's denizens marry wives who soon are utterly dissatisfied with

their sexual performance. When all else fails, concludes the poet, beat the *cownte* with your fists! Here, then, is what Chaucer and the *Sir Tristrem* author (if Benson is right) were trying to avoid.

However, the matter is complicated by the fact that the term which Benson deemed obscene (and thus avoided by Chaucer) does occur in contexts which do not seem to support any suggestion of offensiveness. Lanfranc's art of surgery (a. 1400) contains the statement that "in wymmen þe necke of þe bladdre is schort & is maad faste to the cunte,"²³⁴ and the Latin-English dictionary known as the *Medulla grammaticæ* (a. 1425) defines *vulva* as "a count or a wombe." It would seem, then, that certain technical and/or scientific contexts could justify the use of the "proper" term *conte* just as much as some "improper" term or euphemism.

Here I apply the technical distinction, as explained above (where we discussed its use by Jean de Meun), between speaking *proprie* and *improprie*; it may be of some help as we attempt to answer the question of whether Alisoun's language can be called obscene (and, if so, in what sense). Leaving aside the craftily complicated *queynte*, it may be said that on occasion Chaucer's text makes "improper" rather than "proper" reference to the sexual organs, as when Alisoun refers to her sexual organ as a *bele chose* ("pretty thing"; DIII 447, 510). These two occasions are textually well attested, as is the passage wherein she puts her personal spin on the clerks' reasons for the creation of the human genitalia, here called "thynges smale" (121), both the male and female members being designated as "instruments" (132, 149). Neither of these words seems offensive in itself, "thyng" being the vaguest of terms (and frequently used in Middle English where a more precise word was unavailable to, or unusable by, the writer or speaker), and "instrument" being a term which was applied to a wide range of body parts and bodily agencies, as the *Middle English Dictionary* attests. The Wife also remarks that "every wight" who has "swich harneys" as she has been describing, is entitled to use them "in engendrure" (135–37). Jean de Meun's *Raison* had argued that since the private parts were created by God they were created good and honorable and hence can be named directly; the Wife of Bath agrees that they were created good—and therefore people (like her) who put them to the specific uses for which they were created, one of these being "engendrure" (115ff.), are free from blame.²³⁵ (This is, of course, some distance away from the argument that possession of testicles *oblige*s one to use them sexually, an argument attacked in Jerome's *Adversus Jovinianum* and certainly not endorsed by Alisoun; cf. our discussion in the previous section of this chapter.) The tone and tenor of this discussion of the "membres . . . of generacion" (116)—the term "membre" itself being the most decorous possible—is

generally academic, with a veneer of medical and theological discourses. This is hardly surprising, given that Chaucer's primary source for the first part of this prologue is the *Adversus Jovinianum*. And sometimes the Wife sounds rather like a present-day "Trotula"—i.e., Trotula di Ruggiero, supposedly an authority on obstetrics and gynecology at Salerno in the eleventh or twelfth century; the treatise attributed to this *magistra mulier sapiens* formed part of Jankyn's book (III(D) 677).²³⁶ In particular, with Alisoun's medical use of *bele chose* may be compared a passage in some versions of the Middle English *Knowing of Woman's Kind in Childing*, wherein the vagina is said to be called "in Frenche" a "bele chose or ellys a wykket of þe wombe."²³⁷

To attempt to categorize more precisely the language in use here: it would seem that the Wife of Bath is on the one hand using euphemisms to designate the private body parts, while on the other she is naming them directly by using language which may be deemed "scientific" in the usual scholastic sense of the term, i.e., language which comes from, and is expressive of, knowledge, *scientia*. This was the sense in which the term was used when St. Thomas Aquinas asked if "the gift of wise and 'scientific' speech (*gratia sermonis sapientiae et scientiae*)" may be granted to woman (cf. our discussion in Chapter 3 above). This question should be answered in the affirmative, it would seem, inasmuch as the Wife of Bath is *de facto* using terminology which is also found in medical contexts of the most respectable kind, where any suggestion of obscenity seems absurd. In other words, Chaucer's gift of an academic voice to the Wife of Bath may bring along with it the defense that her academic analysis of marital sexuality licenses her to engage in plain speaking about certain matters which no *sage ancienne* would normally discuss. The situation is further complicated, however, by the fact that medical writers do not always name things *proprie* or directly all the time; on occasion they too make use of euphemisms. So where, then, does this leave the Wife of Bath? In search of answers we must return, yet again, to where Chaucer found her and her attendant linguistic problems, in the pages of Jean de Meun's *Roman de la Rose*.

Lady Raison, in her excursus on the relationship between words and things, had engaged in antifeminist satire about the hypocrisy of women, as revealed by their use of euphemisms in designating the male genitalia:

Chascune qui les va nomant
 les apele ne sai conmant,
 borses, harnais, riens, piches, pines,
 ausint con ce fussent espines;
 mes nes sentent bien joignanz,
 els nes tienent pas a poignanz. (7111–16)

[The women who name them call them all sorts of things: purses, harness, things,

torches, picks, as though they were thorns, but when they feel them very near they do not find them painful.]

Even though women refuse to use the “proper” names, they certainly like the things themselves! But what of contexts in which sexual desire is not an issue, as when women tend the babies in their care, or in diagnostic contexts, in which the naming of private parts seems necessary in order that one may receive the correct treatment? Jean de Meun’s *Amant* had posed at least part of this question to *Raison*, noting that even “bawdy and simple” nurses speak otherwise (*autrement*) when holding and bathing their children (6907–11)—to which *Raison* replies that, were they to speak “properly” or directly (*proprement*), they would not sin thereby (7101–6). Responding to this exchange, Christine de Pizan struggles to find body language which combines precise referentiality with respectability. If she herself fell ill and, in attempting to describe her condition, referred to the “secret members (*secrés membres*) or whatever else” by a certain name which was other than the “proper name” (*propre non*), then, she says, that name would not become dishonorable, due to the fact that her purpose was not dishonorable.²³⁸ It is not altogether clear what Christine means here by names other than “proper” names, but I presume she has euphemisms in mind (as *Amant* probably had when he described nurses speaking *autrement*). However, Christine continues, if on such an occasion she were to designate the private parts by their “proper” names, then anything which was dishonorable about those words would continue to exist. They could not escape the taint of dishonor, since “la premiere entencion de la chose a ja fait le non deshonneste” [“the primary associations of the thing have already made the name dishonourable”].²³⁹ But Christine herself would not be to blame, given her own good intention.

If I have interpreted this passage correctly, it may be concluded that, *pace* Jean de Meun’s *Raison*, it’s better to use euphemisms in diagnostic contexts at least, because those names are not dishonorable, neither do they become dishonorable by association with the *secrés membres*. On this same argument, if the members are named in “proper” or direct speech, that speech retains some taint of dishonor. So, then, Lanfranc’s art of surgery is not to be blamed for its use of the term “cunte,” given the author’s good intention, but the word cannot escape the *premiere entencion de la chose*—a dishonorable association well exemplified by its use in the poem on “Lyard,” as cited above.

What is perfectly clear, however, is that Christine’s linguistic deliberations are underpinned by a quite standard tenet of medieval language theory, the belief that a word is “shameful or honest” only “according to the shameful or the honesty of the thing signified,”

as Raoul Ardent's *Speculum universale* puts it.²⁴⁰ Christine herself assured Jean de Montreuil that "Le nom ne fait la deshonesteté de la chose, mais la chose fait le nom deshonneste"; the name does not make the thing dishonorable, but the thing, the name. Hence there is no point in trying to avoid the indecent name *coilles* by substituting the word *reliques* ("relics") for it. Here Christine echoes the example Raison had offered whilst explaining the conventional, *ad placitum*, nature of language²⁴¹—and no doubt had in mind the fact that Jean de Meun makes such a substitution when describing Amant's sexual consummation at the end of the poem.²⁴² It would seem, then, that *any* name for certain body parts, no matter how euphemistic or polite they may be, would offend against decency. By the same token, any words which describe things which are judged to be disgusting and immoral are an offense against decency.

If that definition of obscenity is applied to the Wife of Bath's language, there is no doubt that it stands convicted of obscenity. No matter that she may use some euphemisms, language of a kind which Christine de Pizan had (briefly) tried to rescue from the taint of dishonor. In a passage such as the one wherein she declares that she is reserving her vagina for her husband's exclusive use, even though she could make lots of money if she sold it (444–50), the euphemisms or quasi-euphemisms *queynte* and *bele chose* add no decorous veil or veneer. It seems pointless to worry about whether we are dealing with a true euphemism or a word with an independent meaning, whether certain words are offensive in themselves, or whether Alisoun's language is, in technical terms, *proprie* or *improprie*. If dirty things—at least, things judged to be dirty by those "wise princesses" invoked in Christine de Pizan's *Livre des trois vertus*—make dirty the words which designate them, then Alisoun is talking dirty. And Alisoun is no Dame Raison; the fact that she shares her French predecessor's taste for risqué "proper names" is hardly enough to make her an elevated spokesperson for the divine will (which is how Jean de Meun thinks of Raison when he's not playing language-games with and through her). Neither can the "scientific defense" be applied, since Alisoun has more than a merely academic interest in the "instruments" and "membres . . . of generacion" (III(D) 116).

But, in at least some of the passages where euphemisms are being used, could Chaucer be seeking to implicate (however tentatively) satire of the kind which Jean de Meun directed at hypocritical women who refuse to name *proprement* those parts of the male anatomy which in fact give them great pleasure? Indeed, three of the "improper" (i.e., indirect) words assigned to the Wife of Bath in the *Riverside Chaucer*—purses, harness, and things²⁴³—feature in Raison's list of such verbal evasions. If such a purpose was there, it has been drowned out by the

clamor of the Wife of Bath's performance of female desire. Whatever else may be said against her, she is no hypocrite. Alisoun openly "publishes" the pleasure she takes in male "membres" and the enthusiasm with which she liberally ("frely") pays her marriage debt (III(D) 148–57; cf. 331–32 and 444–50). The long section wherein she browbeats her old husbands by foisting upon them criticisms of women in general and herself in particular (ll. 235ff.) includes the open admission that she denied them sexual favors until she got her own way (408–12) and faked orgasm to make them feel good (416–18). Speaking about sex rarely gets plainer and more direct than this. It flies in the face of Christine de Pizan's recommendation that widows should avoid giving cause for "defamation or slander" by using modest and decent expression, and that elderly women should ensure that "foolish, vulgar words do not issue" from their mouths. Furthermore, it may be noted that much of this material comes from Jean de Meun's account of La Vielle,²⁴⁴ and if Christine de Pizan had found in her discourse "nothing but total filth and vile teaching" then surely that is the way in which she would have reacted to that same discourse in the mouth of the Wife of Bath (however much she might have admired Alisoun's excursus on the painting of lions, at III(D) 692–96).

Neither—on this present argument—does the suggestion that Alisoun does not talk as dirty as literary predecessors and peers like Gautier le Leu's *veuve*, or serve as the occasion for much authorial dirty talk, afford any real mitigation. For this interpretive crux is not to be resolved by comparing and contrasting the number of dirty words which the two texts have to offer (an exercise which, as already suggested, reveals the Wife of Bath as relatively restrained). Rather, the dirty deeds being done in both texts are quite similar—and quite damning. *Le nom ne fait la deshonesteté de la chose, mais la chose fait le nom deshonneste*. True, Chaucer makes occasional gestures toward the presentation of the Wife of Bath as a bourgeois businesswoman (gestures which have received much, perhaps excessive, attention lately),²⁴⁵ but they should not obscure the fundamental fact of her origins in antifeminist texts. As Lee Patterson elegantly puts it, the Wife "remains confined within the prison house of masculine language."²⁴⁶ To develop this argument further: Chaucer allows the Wife of Bath to condemn herself out of her own mouth, by using certain terms which could be termed obscene, to be sure, but (this being the heart of the matter) by blatantly and unashamedly engaging in behavior which itself is *dura*, *turpis*, and *immunda*—in a word, *obscenus*.²⁴⁷ And at least some of her readers have reacted accordingly, across many generations—ranging from Sir John Harington's use of the Wife to exemplify Chaucer's "flat scurrilitie"²⁴⁸ and John Dryden's

refusal to translate her Prologue “because ’tis too licentious”²⁴⁹ through D. W. Robertson’s (disapproving) vision of a “literary personification of rampant ‘femininity’ or carnality”²⁵⁰ and E. T. Donaldson’s (mischievously approving) view of Alisoun as a “gloriously immoral person.”²⁵¹

Alisoun’s corporeality and corporeal desires feature prominently in her *Prologue*, undeterred by the distancing effect of the academic and technical vocabularies on which she draws and despite (or perhaps even because of) her occasional euphemisms. Many of the negative connotations of vetularity and widowhood are operating forcefully. Thus she manifests in a particularly extreme way what Foucault has termed the hysterization of women’s bodies, i.e., the process whereby the female form is analyzed as being thoroughly saturated with sexuality. Alisoun stands as a clear (if complicated) example of the shrewish, predatory female, of the dirty old (or at least aging) woman. In short, she is an obscene creature.

The Wisdom of Old Women

I have pursued this argument at some length due to my desire to recuperate Alisoun’s power to shock, a power which, I believe, should be given its full value in any reading of the *Wife of Bath’s Prologue and Tale*. However, while there is much truth here, it is not, I believe, the whole truth. Although constructed from antifeminist antecedents of a kind which may easily be identified and catalogued, nevertheless at key stages in her performance Alisoun manages to manipulate and/or marginalize them “to attempt an argument against the position of inferiority they posit for women.”²⁵² Here I borrow another phrase from Susan Crane. However, I would dispute the way in which Crane uses a real-life *vetula*, Margaret Starre, to support this position. The 1381 rising included the seizure and destruction of certain books and documents belonging to scholars of the University of Cambridge. At one large bonfire in the market square, a certain Margaret Starre is described as scattering “the heap of ashes to the wind, crying ‘Away with the knowledge of clerks, away with it.’” Crane proceeds to compare those two book-burners Margaret and Alisoun in respect of their “resistance to clerical authority,” which she conflates with “a wider hostility to clerical learning.”²⁵³ But as I see it, the Wife of Bath does not want to do away with the knowledge of clerks but rather to use it for her own ends. Therefore, she is rather to be aligned with those *vetulae* who (along with secret heretics and laymen) are described by William of Ockham as always troubling learned men (*litteratos viros*) with arguments concerning divine power, necessity, and contingency.²⁵⁴ One may also recall Bishop Reginald Pecock’s complaint about certain women (albeit not specifically old women)

who, having made themselves wise by the Bible, presume to dispute against clerks in their own homes (cf. pp. 247–48 above). There seems no reason to doubt that Pecock is speaking here from personal experience, but his wording recalls a passage in Jerome's letter to Paulinus which attacks the "chatty old woman, the doting old man, and the wordy sophist," who "take in hand the Scriptures, rend them in pieces and teach them before they have learned them. Some . . . philosophize concerning the sacred writings among weak women. Others—I blush to say it—learn of women what they are to teach men."²⁵⁵ This passage was quoted approvingly in Thomas Netter's *Doctrinale*, in refutation of the case which John Purvey had made for female preachers (as noted in Chapter 3 above).

Generally the *vetula* had a bad press in scholastic discourse. Commenting on the tenth book of the *Ethics*, Albert the Great took the old woman who, in medicine, "heals without knowing the reasons involved in the art" as illustrative of action which is undertaken without knowledge or understanding—thereby demeaning women's practice of an art in which they were traditionally deemed to have some expertise.²⁵⁶ A more elaborate account is offered in Jean Buridan's commentary on the same text, which begins with the proposition that "an old woman who loves God pleases God because she loves Him, although she has little knowledge of God," whereas a great cleric, "who has much knowledge of God," does "not please God if he does not love God." Buridan concludes that the old woman loves God more and judges "more steadily that God should be loved and loved above all else and that his commandments should be observed above all others." For, although the cleric "knows demonstratively that God is best and the cause of all things," he may judge "that God is not better for him than pleasure, money, or honours," and that living voluptuously or dominating tyrannically is preferable to observing the divine commandments. For these reasons, then, "the old woman is more pleasing to God."²⁵⁷ Fine words, but here—yet again—the *vetula* functions as the exemplar of faithful ignorance, in contrast with the learned cleric, who may have more to tempt him but who remains her social and intellectual superior. And, of course, Buridan's argument is directed at clerks, warning them of the importance of loving as well as knowing, and emphasizing the great temptations which threaten them in their high positions. In both these cases, the *vetula* serves as an extreme test-case, a means of investigating the outer limits of certain actions, discovering where their value or efficacy begins and ends. This is also true of certain cases in which sacramental agency is being tested, with the "minimum requirement" which is acceptable in exceptional circumstances being set. "When an old woman baptizes, the baptism actually does take place," declares Albert the Great: *vetula*

baptizat, et baptizatum est. Even an old woman can do it, in case of utter necessity; one does not have to be of the masculine sex, have holy orders or jurisdiction, or be living a good life.²⁵⁸ No lower human life-form, it would seem, may be found; the *vetula* is at the very bottom of the heap. It took a radical thinker like Walter Brut to reverse the polarities, taking this admission as a proof that women can perform priestly functions, even including the confection of the Eucharist, at least in certain circumstances (cf. pp. 223–24 above).

Walter Brut was tried for heresy in 1391–93. A central thesis of the present book is that the 1390s were an exceptionally fruitful—and in certain cases a highly dangerous—time for inquiry into the relationship between public office and private ethics, institutional status and individual worthiness, and for weighing in the balance conflicting opinions on whether there was any necessary correlation between pedagogic authority and personal virtue. In the *Pardoner's Tale*, which dates from around 1390, we are presented with the startling proposition that the most immoral of men can assume the superlative office of preacher and tell the most moral of tales. The *Wife of Bath's Prologue and Tale*, generally dated to the mid-1390s, is, I believe, even more daring than that. In the *Prologue* Chaucer took one of the most despised stereotypes in medieval literature, the sexually rapacious widow, and provided her with a powerful scholastic-style defense of sexual desire; in effect she is brought into disputation with—and acquits herself well against—the mighty St. Jerome. In her *Tale* this character depicts an even more despised stereotype, the *vetula* or *vielle*, dispensing wisdom of the highest order rather than talking dirty and teaching the art of sexual promiscuity. These maneuvers, I believe, decisively separate Alisoun from her antifeminist ancestors.

Chaucer's academically adept *veuve* offers a unique version of the tale of the loathly damsel, which invests the *vetula* with sovereignty of soul—that achievement being the topic of the following, and final, section of this chapter. Suffice it to note here that one of the most striking features of Alisoun's narrative is the lack of a comprehensive account of the damsel's loathliness, which in other versions of the same story is detailed at great and grisly length. For instance, Chaucer's contemporary and friend John Gower recounts how the superlative knight Florent, whose virtue will eventually break the spell which has trapped a fair lady “of eyhtetiene wynter age” in an aged woman's body, is horrified by the spectacle of “a lothy wommannysch figure,” “So foul yit syh he nevere non” (*Confessio amantis*, I, 1803, 1530–32).²⁵⁹ Gower expends fourteen lines in enumerating her ugly qualities, concluding grimly that “She hath no lith [limb] withoute a lak” (1678–91). Similarly, in the fifteenth-century *Wedding of Sir Gawain and Dame Ragnelle*, King Arthur—for here it is he who must

discover “whate wemen love best in feld and town” (91)—encounters an “old” and “foulle” woman (300, 306, 476), “as ungoodly a creature / As evere man sawe” (228–29). To cut this long story short, no tongue could truly tell “the fowlnesse of that Lady,” so great was her “lothynesse” (243–45).²⁶⁰ Later, when Gawain plights “his trowthe” to Dame Ragnelle (538–40), her ugliness is restated. Now we learn that she has two teeth like boar’s tusks, a wide mouth foully grown and covered in gray hairs, lips which lie lumpish on her chin, and no neck (545–49). “She was a lothly on!” (556).²⁶¹

But there is nothing of the kind in the *Wife of Bath’s Tale*; all we get is the single line, “A fouler wight ther may no man devyse” (III (D) 999). A clue to the omission of such a *descriptio* may be found in the paradox, well expressed by Shahar, that while on the one hand “the old body . . . had no positive valuation,” on the other hand “ageing was considered conducive to increased wisdom, to spiritual growth, as well as to liberation from passion and earthly ambitions.”²⁶² Given that Chaucer’s aged woman will deliver a wonderful homily on true nobility and related topics, he would have been reluctant to undermine her position with negative corporeal imagery. Yet he was able to play on the moral advantages of vetularity, which frequently feature in “holy saints lives” (the only clerical texts, Alisoun remarks caustically, that speak well of women). In this genre old age is valorized within what might be termed the *spiritual* “female life-cycle”;²⁶³ once they reached mature age certain holy women took upon themselves, with official blessing, a more socially interactive role, advising their communities, exhorting people of both sexes to virtue, and even making prophecies. Furthermore, it was a great compliment to describe a young woman with spiritual aspirations as being old before her time. Juliana of Mont-Cornillon’s biographer describes her as “in body . . . a little girl (*juvencula*), but in mind a grey-haired old lady (*cana*),”²⁶⁴ while Raymond of Capua recounts how there was nothing girlish about the actions of the six-year-old Catherine of Siena; rather they seemed like the dignified behavior of an old woman.²⁶⁵

Later in life, Catherine wishes to join the Dominican sisters of Penance, but is initially rebuffed, because it is not their practice to invest young girls or virgins with the habit; they admit only widows of mature age and unblemished reputation who want to dedicate themselves to the service of God.²⁶⁶ However, the sisters partially relent in the face of the entreaties of Catherine’s mother: “If your daughter is not too pretty or attractive corporeally,” they say cautiously, “we will receive her”; but “if she is very pretty we should be afraid of some scandal due to male malice.”²⁶⁷ Fortunately, at this time Catherine’s whole body has come out in blisters, and so she

passes their scrutiny—and, of course, proceeds to bring much honor to the Siennese sisters.

In the *Wife of Bath's Tale* the erasure of female beauty is similarly consonant with profound wisdom. Here in “elde” is seen a “wysdom and usage”²⁶⁸ which far exceeds that proffered in the *Wife's Prologue*, where we were advised that a “wyse womman” will constantly be busy in seeking love (I(A) 209), while “wyves that been wyse” (229; cf. 225, 231) are skilled at browbeating their husbands into submission, for no man can swear and lie half as “boldely” as a woman can (227–28). (Indeed, old men do not appear to advantage in the *Prologue* either, being revealed as credulous creatures who can be manipulated through their lusts with ludicrous ease.) *Au contraire*, in the Wife's tale *elde* is rescued from such denigration as a wise old woman, addressing her young but vicious husband, speaks movingly of a sovereignty of soul which transcends the boundaries of geography and gender. Take fire to the darkest house between here and the remote “mount of Kaukasous,” and it will burn just as brightly as if twenty thousand men beheld it (III(D) 1139–43).

This epiphanic moment is all too brief. The romance conventions, which require the happy ending of a bath of married bliss, reassert themselves as the *vetula* becomes a beautiful and subservient young wife. But, I believe, the challenge of Chaucer's virtuous *vetula* remains; its force is not negated retrospectively by the tale's ending, which puts the man (despite his earlier crime of violent rape) back on top and recalls the Wife of Bath's strong sexual appetites as she prays for “Housbondes meeke, yonge, and fressh abedde” (1259–60). In the rare and transitory textual moment of her astonishing moral disquisition, the aged female figure may be seen as more than a misogynistic amalgam of obscene words and deeds, poisonous humors, and jealous involvement in the affairs of youth. By having the Wife of Bath speak after her “fantasye” (190), Chaucer engages in creative inversion that opens up new possibilities for literature, perhaps even for life. Fantasy has the power to transcend the historical realities wherein we live and desire, to refuse the normative power-relations which constrain our existence; indeed, the fantastic pleasure of imagining the world otherwise discloses ways in which the social order may be transformed.²⁶⁹

But maybe that's just an old wives' tale.

IV. BEYOND THE BODY? ALISOUN ON SOVEREIGNTY OF SOUL

The title of the previous section echoes and engages with the title of Jan Ziolkowski's splendid essay on “The Obscenities of Old Women,” my view being that, far from merely reproducing an offensive *vetula*/

vielle-figure who embodies “total filth and vile teaching” (which is how Christine de Pizan thought of Jean de Meun’s old crone),²⁷⁰ in the *Wife of Bath’s Tale* Chaucer ventured to construct an elderly woman in possession of knowledge and wisdom which exceed expertise in the art of love and amatory “praktike,” or those tricks which “wise wyves” use to manipulate their husbands (cf. III(D) 225–28). We will now explore further Alisoun’s apotheosis of vetular virtue by contrasting her Canterbury tale with what may be regarded as the traditional narrative pattern of the “loathly damsel” story (given that the other versions of the tale which I shall be citing all conform to it).

A constant part of this pattern seems to be the entrapment—justified by the fairy-tale circumstances, and licensing a robust expression of female desire—of the knight who surpasses all others in reputation and deed, since he has the power to break the spell which will free the loathly damsels from their much diminished state. Hence they must gain “sovereignty” over their menfolk, what Chaucer calls “mastery”; both terms are well-documented in Middle English as meaning “supremacy in respect of power, domination, or rank; supreme dominion, authority, or rule,” and often denote “the position, rank, or power of a supreme ruler or monarch; royal authority or dominion.”²⁷¹ In a particular sense “sovereignty” can specify dominance in matters of love and marriage, as when, in the *Clerk’s Tale*, Walter is reassured by his subjects that “spousaille or wedlok” is a “blisful yok / Of soverayntee” of husband over wife (IV(E) 113–15), and Alisoun, in the *Wife of Bath’s Prologue*, challenges that normative situation by recounting how she acquired, “by maistrie, al the soveraynetee” over her husband Jankyn (III(D) 818–19). That is also how the term is used in the major analogues of the *Wife of Bath’s Tale*. However, Chaucer goes far beyond the sexualization of sovereignty which is such a prominent feature of those stories, a restricting process which renders any profound valence of *maistrie* impossible. For in his hands the tale explores larger issues of dominion (*dominium*), a term often translated as “sovereignty” in Middle English—and indeed in Modern English, as in Michael Wilks’s magisterial study, *The Problem of Sovereignty in the Later Middle Ages*.²⁷² Throughout the present book we have often queried the consequences of Wyclif’s theory of dominion, which relates authority to God-given grace rather than to a person’s actual position in society, the result of high birth and/or professional achievement and official recognition. The *Wife of Bath’s Tale*, which has a low-born woman at once teach and exemplify the belief that true nobility (Latin *nobilitas*, rendered as *gentil(l)esse* by Chaucer)²⁷³ is due to divine grace rather than advantageous birth, is the optimum text, in the entire Chaucerian oeuvre, to test for traces of the influence of that dangerous theory. If it

is going to show up anywhere, surely this would be the place.

The Lusts of Loathly Damsels: Sovereignty as Sexual Possession

In Chaucer's version of the "loathly damsel" tale, the old and ugly crone uniquely serves as the guardian of truth and honor. Here the spellbound heroine's virtue dominates, in contrast with John Gower's *Tale of Florent* wherein the *trowthe* of the heroic knight constitutes the moral center of gravity. It is this truth which sets free the loathly damsel in distress. In order to escape from the spell, she must win the

. . . love and sovereynete

Of what knyht that in his degre

Alle other passeth of good name. . . . (*Confessio amantis*, I, 1847–49)

—that being Florent, of course. In the fifteenth-century *Wedding of Sir Gawain and Dame Ragnelle* the object of desire is Gawain, "the best of Englonde" (695). I say "desire" advisedly, given that here gaining "sovereynté" seems little more than getting to possess and enjoy the most manly of men. To quote from Dame Ragnelle's leering account,

" . . . there is one thyng is alle oure fantasye, *fancy*
And that nowe shalle ye knowe.
We desyren of men above alle maner thyng
To have the sovereynté, withoute lesyng,
Of alle, bothe hyghe and lowe.
For where we have sovereynté, alle is ourys,
Thoughe a knyght be nevere so ferys,
And evere the mastery wyne. *mastery*
Of the moste manlyest is oure desyre;
To have the sovereynté of suche a syre, *a lord*
Suche is oure crafte and gynne." (420–30)²⁷⁴ *skill; art*

From the outset, sexual gratification is acknowledged as an essential part of the deal, as the terms of reference of King Arthur's original promise to Ragnelle make abundantly clear. Gawain will marry you, he pledges,

"And your desyre nowe shalle ye have,
Bothe in bowre and in bed." (400–401)

Once the loathly damsel has become "the fayreste creature" that Gawain has ever seen (641–42), "they two theymself alone" proceed to make "joye oute of mynde"—so far as this accorded with reason and nature, the text voyeuristically declares (706–8). "With joye and myrthe they wakyd tylle daye" (715), after which they "lye and slepe" so long that Arthur gets worried lest the fiendish woman has slain Gawain. However, he finds him to be a well-satisfied ("welle good") knight (737).

Even in Gower's more restrained version of the story—where at this point we are minimalistically told that there was "plesance and

joye ynowh” between the two of them, “echon” playing and laughing with the other (I, 1853–54)—sexual comedy features prominently. The masculinist text invites its audience to imagine how disgusting it would be for “this yonge lusti knyht” to have sex with “this olde lothly wiht” (I, 1581–82).

His youthe schal be cast aweie
Upon such on which as the weie
Is old and lothly overal. (I, 1711–13)

After their wedding she begins, quite grotesquely, “to pleie and rage” (1764), demanding that her new husband should take her to “bedde” (I, 1769),

And profreth him with that to kisse,
As sche a lusti Lady were.
His body myhte wel be there,
Bot as of thought and of memoire
His herte was in purgatoire. (I, 1772–76)

But there is no escape. “Abedde naked” together (I, 1781), Florent turns away from his “lothly” bride, whereupon “In armes sche beclipte hire lord,” demanding that he should turn to face her (I, 1791–92). Eventually he forces himself to do so, turning “sodeinly” like “a man in trance” (I, 1800–1801). Whereupon, of course, he discovers that his wife is now a young beauty.

Then comes the moment of choice—Florent, like Gawain in the *Wedding of Sir Gawain and Dame Ragnelle* (656–66),²⁷⁵ must decide whether he wants her fair by day or fair by night. Having a wife who is beautiful by night has obvious amorous advantages, but the morning after she will become ugly once more, to her husband’s acute social embarrassment. Gawain gets the point instantly—if she’s ugly by day, in the sight of all men, he will lose his “worshypp,” whereas if she’s ugly by night he would “have a symple repayre” (a wonderfully understated way of saying that his sexual relations will be miserable; I, 667–74, cf. 659–60).²⁷⁶ The marital “debt of the body” (cf. pp. 285–86 above) must be rendered as payment of the debt which these two reluctant husbands incurred when they accepted an answer that saved their lives but left them with a loathsome legal obligation.

Such is the discourse which frames the *vetula*’s moral disquisition in the *Wife of Bath’s Tale*. When the “olde wyf ” demands marriage of the nameless knight, his first reaction is to ask her to make “a newe requeste” (III(D) 1059); she can take all his “good” (i.e., his possessions), but “lat my body go”! (1061). He is acutely aware of the suffering his body will experience if she insists on her demand. A few lines later we see him accepting the inevitable. He must “taketh his olde wyf, and gooth to bedde” with her (1072). Again, the physical aspect of the arrangement is emphasized. Following the wedding he

hides all day like an owl, but at night is obliged to face her:

Greet was the wo the knight hadde in his thought,
Whan he was with his wyf abedde ybrought . . . (1083–84)

The knight twists and turns in bed, whereupon his “olde wyf,” lying smiling beside him, engages in grotesque sexual teasing: is it the custom in King Arthur’s house for a knight to treat his love, for a husband to treat his wife, with such coolness and disregard (1084–90)? If she has done something wrong, can she amend it? To this faux-naïf question he roughly retorts that she is “loothly,” “oold,” and comes of a “lough . . . kynde” (1100–1101). Whereupon the *vetula* proceeds to instruct him on the benefits of ugliness and age and the fact that true gentility comes from God alone. Following this bracing monologue, and his grant of sovereignty to her, we have a rapid return to the corporeal concerns which preceded it, as the resexualized wife proceeds to “fulfille” her husband’s “worldly appetit,” to his great “joye” (1218, 1252).

Sourcing Dominion: *gentillesse* and Gender

But what happens within the frame (to continue that metaphor) is a marked departure from the stock narrative pattern of the “loathly damsel” story. In Chaucer’s extraordinary moral interregnum, sovereignty is not only desexualized—though that is in itself a crucial difference—but also treated in the most respectful of terms, accorded high philosophical seriousness. *Gentillesse* is simply not an issue in the traditional narrative, wherein noble men act in ways quite consonant with their nobility of birth and the damsels they rescue from corporeal distress are really beautiful noblewomen whose temporary loathliness and social downgrading is the result of a spell inflicted by, say, a wicked stepmother (as in Gower’s *Tale of Florent* and the relevant *Gawain* romances).²⁷⁷ In all those other tellings of the tale the knight is the moral center and the catalyst of transformation; surpassing all others in reputation and deed, he has the power to break the spell and free his new wife from her parlous state. Not so in the *Wife of Bath’s Tale*, which starts with the knight committing an act of violent rape. And this character makes himself even more despicable by complaining, it’s a great pity that “any of my nacioun”—i.e., a person of his (distinguished) family—should be “disparaged” in so “foule” a manner (III(D) 1068–69) by being forced into an inappropriate marriage. It is not simply that his bride-to-be is old and ugly—that being quite enough for the other versions of the story—but she is of low birth as well, comes “of so lough a kynde.” This is not a matter of adding insult to injury. It is the main injury, as he sees it. Whereas, in all the analogues of this story, the knight-figure dreads the purgatory

of physical loathsomeness into which he is about to be plunged, here the arrogant aristocrat's main worry seems to be that his new wife is—simply of the wrong class. Rarely has snobbery seemed more ridiculous, given the other—more physically pressing—problems facing the protagonist.

Alisoun's wise old woman follows this cue, devoting 67 lines out of a total of 106 (i.e., III(D) 1109–214, the extent of her moral disquisition proper) to the argument that gentle is as gentle does. The problem of her “poverte” receives 29, and her “filthe and elde,” a mere 9. That aspect of her status which is of greatest importance in the traditional narrative is here judged to be the least important. Furthermore, *gentillesse* is the first topic to be discussed, the clear implication being that, by acting in a morally churlish manner (“vileyns sinful dedes make a cherl”), the knight with no name has obscured his noble ancestry; how are the mighty fallen! There is no mention of the knight's particular crime of rape; probably there is no need for that. For he stands in sharp contrast to the woman of low birth who is one of nature's nobles; her *gentillesse* comes from personal actions, undertaken freely and with the aid of divine grace, rather than from social privilege. In sum, its source is God.

Al were it that myn auncestres were rude,
Yet may the hye God, and so hope I,
Grante me grace to lyven vertuously.
Thanne am I gentil, whan that I bigynne
To lyven vertuously and weyve synne. (III(D) 1172–76)

To clinch the matter, an impressive array of old “auctours” are invoked—Valerius Maximus, Seneca, and Boethius—and a contemporary one is quoted at length, “the wise poete” Dante (1165–68, 1125–26).

But could another source be lurking behind this shield and defense of *auctor*-ial citation?²⁷⁸ Could some influence have been exerted by the most radical philosophy of dominion current in Chaucer's England, the one associated with Wyclif? *Descendamus ad litteram*. A person of rank is assuredly “more praiseworthy or blameworthy on account of virtue or vice than on account of great eminence or inferiority of status,” Wyclif argues in his *De officio regis*.²⁷⁹ True virtue is consequent on divine grace; only one of the *predestinati* is worthy to hold high office. And such a person can be found anywhere, anytime, anyplace. In chapter nine of *De potestate pape*, where Wyclif is paving the way for the radical comments on “ordination by grace alone” that feature in his subsequent defense of ministry by layfolk, including women,²⁸⁰ that point is made with reference to the Samaritan woman of John 4: 4–30.²⁸¹ The biblical passage in which she accepts Christ as a prophet due to his knowledge of her many marriages and current

adulterous relationship was well known to the Wife of Bath, as our previous discussion has indicated (cf. p. 254 above).²⁸² In Scripture the Samaritan woman goes on to remark, “Our fathers adored [i.e., worshipped] on this mountain: and you say that Jerusalem is the place where men must adore” (v. 20). That is to say, these are the special sites of worship for the Samaritans and Jews respectively. Jesus replies to her saying, “woman, believe me that the hour cometh, when you shall neither on this mountain, nor in Jerusalem, adore the Father. . . . For the hour cometh and now is, when the true adorers shall adore the Father in spirit and in truth” (vv. 21–23). This proves that place does not matter, declares Wyclif. Of the four ancient sees of the church (Alexandria, Antioch, Rome, and Constantinople), three are now regarded “by us” as schismatic and they regard “us” as schismatic, while “the Asians” (presumably Wyclif has in mind the Nestorians) think both groups are deluded, asserting—and they are right in this at least—that it is not place but virtue which sanctifies a people. *Non locus sed virtus gentem sanctificat*. God is a Spirit occupying every place. To worship Him, it’s not necessary to ascend a mountain, like the Samaritans, or go into Solomon’s temple, like the Jews.

The Samaritan woman had long been read as symbolizing how the gentiles drank the water of faith in the early Christian church, at the time when the Gospel was being “published” (*tempus publicationis*).²⁸³ And Christ’s rejoinder was taken as an affirmation that “the Father is to be worshipped in the innermost temple of the heart and in the truth of knowledge.” “A pure spirit is His temple, in which He is praised.”²⁸⁴ What makes Wyclif’s account different is the way in which he generalizes this particular historical situation to apply to all times and places. The faith of the Samaritan woman becomes emblematic of the way in which God will dispense His grace as and when He pleases, predestining the chosen people (whether Jew, gentile, or contemporary Christian) to eternal glory.

All of this is, at least superficially, reminiscent of the way in which Chaucer’s Clerk presents his story of Grisilda as illustrating the truth that

hye God somtyme senden kan
His grace into a litel oxes stalle (IV(E) 1204–7)

In this case, grace has been sent to the “west syde of Ytallie, / Doun at the roote of Vesulus the colde” (57–58), to a woman who is the “povrest of hem alle” (204). The Marquis Walter, who, “to speke of lynage,” was the “gentilleste yborn of Lumbardye” (71–72), has been encouraged by his anxious subjects to marry a woman “born of the gentilleste and of the meeste / Of al this land” (131–32) and beget an heir. Instead he marries the virtuous Grisilda, in the belief that “under

low degree / Was ofte vertu hid" (425–26). And spends the rest of the tale testing this belief to the utmost. Then again, one may recall the moving affirmation by Chaucer's poor and loathly damsel of the fact that *gentillesse* is no respecter of place, whether geographical or social.

Taak fyr and ber it in the derkeste hous
Bitwix this and the mount of Kaukasous,
And lat men shette the dores and go thenne;
Yet wole the fyr as faire lye and brenne
As twenty thousand men myghte it biholde. . . .
. . . God it woot, men may wel often fynde
A lordes sone do shame and vileyne . . .
. . . vileyns synful dedes make a cherl. . . .
Thy gentillesse cometh fro God allone.
Thanne comth oure verray gentillesse of grace;
It was no thyng biquethe us with our place. (III(D) 1139–64)

However, this theory of "verray gentillesse of grace" has none of the distinctive features of Wyclif's doctrine of dominion and predestination, as described above. In particular, there is nothing here of the Lollard belief in grace as an agency which separates the *praedestinati* from the *praesciti*. Instead the core idea is that divine grace bestows upon everyone, whatever his or her origin and status, whether he or she lives "at the roote of Vesulus the colde" or on "the mount of Kaukasous," the potential to act in a way which is truly *gentil*.²⁸⁵ Everything Chaucer needed to formulate that doctrine was to be found in the authorities he actually quotes, namely "Valerius," "Senek," "Boece," and of course "Dant." It must be admitted, however, that Chaucer's knowledge of Valerius Maximus and Seneca was probably limited to a few soundbites. Dante's *Convivio* was certainly known and used, but the very *fons et origo* of the Wife of Bath's excursus on *gentillesse* is Book III, meter vi, of the *Consolatio philosophiae*.

This is the point at which, as Nicholas Trevet O.P. explains in the Boethius commentary which Chaucer knew so well, Dame Philosophy proves that all men are noble, with the exception of those who willfully act contrary to their true human nature.²⁸⁶ Since *nobilitas* is a "certain excellence produced by origin" which is unique to man, Trevet continues, it is that aspect of his origin which makes man man that must chiefly be considered here. Now, it is obvious that man is made man not on account of his body but because of his soul, whence he is rational. And the soul of every man has the same origin, inasmuch as all souls are from God. "No man is now degenerate / Save who embracing baser things to vice forsakes his proper origin" (III, vi, 8–9), this being the divine likeness which the vicious man obscures through his evil actions. In sum, man is noble by virtue and ignoble by vice. "A noble seed produced all mortals," declares Boethius (5),²⁸⁷ the clear implication being that the seed of nobility is

present in all men. The individual must decide whether he wishes to cultivate it or not.

In the previous *prosa* Boethius had drawn a distinction between the glory which results from praise of personal virtue (*laus propriae virtutis*) and the glory which some gain through nobility of blood (*nobilitas sanguinis*).²⁸⁸ Concerning the former, Trevet emphasizes the point that glory (*gloria*) which has falsely been acquired is base (cf. *pr. vi*, 7–8), but also expounds Boethius's further argument that glory acquired by genuine merit does not lead to true happiness either, in the judgment of "wise men," the *sapientes*. (This section of the *Consolatio* begins with the grim general warning that glory is often deceptive (*fallax*) and base (*turpis*.) Turning now to *nobilitas sanguinis*, if this is related to renown (*claritas*), it belongs to another; in this sense nobility seems to be a kind of praise (*laus*) deriving from the merits of one's parents (22–24). But if you have no praise of your own, that which proceeds from your parents does not make you famous. If there is anything good in nobility by descent, it is this: there seems to be an obligation imposed on the noble not to let their nobility degenerate, through vicious actions, from the virtue of their ancestors. Hearing that argument, the irony in the rapist-knight's lament that a member of a family as distinguished as his should be "so foul disparaged" through marriage to the low-born loathly damsel (1068–69) becomes all the more evident—for it is he who has "disparaged" his "nacioun" by his crime of taking a "maydenhed" by "verray force" (886–88).

It is better to come from an ignoble family and be eager to please (by performing virtuous deeds, presumably) than to be from noble stock and degenerate through vices, continues Trevet. Therefore, Juvenal says in his eighth satire, "I would rather that Thersites were your father if only you were like the grandson of Aeacus [i.e., Achilles], and could wield the arms of Vulcan, than that you should have been begotten by Achilles and be like Thersites" (*Satura viii*, 269–71). Here Thersites is the type of the low-born upstart, and Achilles, of the high-ranking, and high-minded, aristocrat. Better to rise from low to high, than lapse from high to low!

Commentary such as this helps us to understand the appeal which Boethius had for aristocratic readers, layfolk with lifestyles and priorities very different from those of its sixth-century author. Translations of the *Consolatio philosophiae* feature prominently in the list of books which were deemed appropriate gifts for kings (or which kings could appropriately commission), rubbing shoulders with texts like Giles of Rome's *De regimine principum* (Aristotle for aristocrats), and Vegetius's *De re militari* (read as an art of chivalry). For instance, Jean de Meun addressed his vernacular Boethius to the king of France,

King Philip the Fair. (This is the primary source of Chaucer's *Boece*; one can only wonder about which noble dedicatee he had in mind when he undertook the work of translation). The doctrine that men who are noble by birth should also be noble in deed would have at once edified and reassured such an audience. In the *Consolatio* they found no threat to their "gentle" status but rather an implicit (or at least potential) confirmation of it. In Achilles they saw the ideal image of themselves; in Thersites, the horrifying alternative, the unacceptable face of class shame and social failure. And they were, for the most part, content to leave to "wise men" the thought that fame and glory acquired even by genuine merit does not bring true happiness. Rather their nobility obliged them to seek worldly honors and the praise of their peers.

Such fresh, and distinctly laicizing, concerns underlie two passages in Jean de Meun's *Roman de la Rose*, wherein the *Consolatio*'s distinction between nobility of blood and nobility of soul features prominently. In the first, Dame Nature assimilates Boethian doctrine to aristocratic interests (and fashions) by asserting that nobility (*noblece*) comes from an upright heart (*bon courage*); gentility of birth is worthless if it lacks goodheartedness (18589–92).²⁸⁹ Ancient men who did good works died and took their virtues with them; their descendants have their fathers' material wealth, but nothing more, no nobility or worth, unless they themselves act in a noble fashion. And when they do so, they fulfill the ideals of knighthood (18593–600). Knights strong in arms and courteous in speech, who practice liberality, honor, and chivalry, should be praised and held dear by everyone (18667–80); here praise and esteem (*los e pris*; 18663) are given a far more positive valence than they enjoy in the *Consolatio*. This account takes an unusual turn when Jean remarks that clerks have a greater chance to be gentle, courteous, and wise than princes who may be unlearned and ignorant of books in which the virtues are described.²⁹⁰ Here, then, the parameters of *gentillesse* have been extended beyond the sphere of the aristocrats—or, more precisely, another privileged group has been admitted. This inclusiveness is hardly surprising given the Boethian assertion that "*all* human kind on earth arises from the same origin. . . ." But we are still some distance away from the *nobilitas virtutis* of low-bred Grisilda and Alisoun's old woman from "so lough a kynde" (III(D) 1101). And Jean's account depicts women as the beneficiaries of *noblece* rather than possessors and cultivators of it: Dame Nature goes on to say that the truly noble man (whether knight or clerk, it seems) should be humble in heart, courteous, and gentle (*gent*) to all men—and he ought to honor all women (a far cry from the churlish behavior of Alisoun's rapist-knight). Indeed, all women should be honored though not all of them

deserve it! For Dame Nature (no sister she) adds the misogynistic rider that little confidence should be placed in the female sex, “for no one is too good, however she may seem” (18661–62). Here there is no possibility whatever of a *magistra nobilitatis* (to coin a phrase).

However, elsewhere in the *Rose* such a figure does appear (again Boethius is the main source, and again the laicizing process is evident).²⁹¹ Describing the downfall of Croesus, king of Lydia, Jean de Meun portrays a woman who is well-versed in the doctrine of true *noblece*, counseling her father accordingly—an episode which has broad but intriguing parallels with Chaucer’s *mise-en-scène* in the *Wife of Bath’s Tale* of a wife counseling a husband. (Chaucer knew Jean’s narrative well, for it is the primary source for his own tale of Croesus in the *Monk’s Tale*, VII(B2) 2727–60).²⁹² The “sage and wise” Phanie, a pagan equivalent of those Christian holy women who were empowered through reception of the gift of prophecy (as discussed in our previous chapter), interprets a dream her father has experienced as a warning against Fortune, which is threatening to “tie a halter round” his neck. Only gentility (in the sense of true nobility) is valued by Fortune. If Croesus were truly “gentle,” Phanie continues, he might avoid the downfall to which his pride and vanity are leading him. Gentility, being noble, will not enter the heart of a “villain” in the moral sense of the term (once again, that emphasis on *bon courage*). Therefore Croesus should flee from such villainy and set an example to the rich and powerful by his liberal and merciful rule. But the foolish ruler does not listen, and Phanie’s prediction comes true.

Here the assumption is that the doctrine of *noblece* (and presumably its practice) is the same for men and women. A fuller, and rather more divisive, treatment may be found in one of the most comprehensive medieval treatises on the nature of *nobilitas*, William of Aragon’s *De nobilitate animi*, which dates from the late thirteenth century.²⁹³ This devotes a short but highly significant chapter to the topic, “De nobilitate mulieris in comparatione ad virum,” structured in accord with the *quaestio* form.²⁹⁴ William begins by exploring the possibility that men and women are *not* equally noble. It would seem that where actions (*operaciones*) are better and more noble, the nobility of those who perform them is greater and better. Given that men’s actions are better and more noble than women’s, it follows that they are the more noble sex. For the *operaciones* of men are “common” (*communes*, i.e., universal, public) whereas those of women are domestic and private (*domestice et private*). A second proof is then offered. In nature, the more perfect is also the more noble, and since man is more perfect than woman he is also more noble than she.

Arguments *contra* are then marshaled, the first being a statement of the obvious fact that the actions of many individual women are better

than the actions of many individual men. Furthermore, women are of the same species as men, and therefore should possess the same nobility. But this potentially subversive principle is promptly discarded, as William turns for his solution to the eighth book of Aristotle's *Nicomachean Ethics*, where "The Philosopher" explains that the kinds of work appropriate to men and women are naturally distinct. Private, domestic, and "familial" arrangements (*privata et domestica et familiariter ordinata*) fall to women, whereas men are involved with "external" works which require greater foresight and harder work. William is seeking to confine women to the sphere of "economics" or housecraft, as defined and described at considerable length in a treatise then regarded as a genuine work of Aristotle, the *Economics*.²⁹⁵ To cite John Gower's version of the widely disseminated doctrine, "Iconomique" involves the rule and guidance of "wif," "child," and "al the companie" that in a lord's "houshold schal abyde" (*Confessio amantis*, VII, 1669–78). Here, then, is the natural sphere of operation for women who live the *activa vita*, as opposed to the religious life. The aim of William of Aragon's discussion is the promotion of a doctrine of complementarity: in their different ways and in their separate spheres, both sexes serve the common good, right reason guiding them in their respective spheres. Therefore, men and women are equally noble—proportionately speaking.²⁹⁶ That is where William wishes to place the emphasis, at least in this part of his treatise; his interest is in providing an argument in favor of the equality of the sexes in respect of their heaven-sent nobility. But there is no getting away from the fact that, in simple and absolute terms, male *nobilitas* is superior to female *nobilitas*. That is the assumption that Chaucer was to turn upside down in the *Wife of Bath's Tale*.

William of Aragon has important things to say also about "nobility of dominion" (*nobilitas dominiorum*). Building on Boethius's invocation of the (Platonic) ideal of the philosopher-king,²⁹⁷ he asserts that "according to the truth of things" a delinquent ruler "is not a lord but a slave, and not noble but vile." (William offers no advice on what commoners can or should do if their rulers prove "vile" rather than noble.) Providing that lords act virtuously, however, by using their intellect and reason to ensure the welfare of all their subjects and keep the peace, their nobility is superior to that of their subjects, since they have more people under their control than have commoners.²⁹⁸ William develops this idea further when judging which kind of nobility is the best.²⁹⁹ *Nobilitas dominiorum* is awarded the prize, for it has the greatest potential for good operation, since the actions of one noble lord are more "common" (i.e., serve the public good better) and are more useful than those of any other type of noble person. Lest Boethius begins to spin in his grave at this apparent challenge of the

summum bonum by the *respublica*, William squares the circle by recalling that nobility of soul is what makes a ruler truly noble. So, in this sense, nobility of dominion is the *effect* of nobility of soul.

Dante's contribution to the debate on *nobilitas* in his *Convivio* marks a return to the clear Boethian binary between *nobilitas sanguinis* and *nobilitas virtutis* (though here they are elaborated in ways which owe more to Aristotle's *Nicomachean Ethics* than to the *Consolatio philosophiae*). The Roman Emperor Frederick of Swabia is credited with the view that *gentilezza* consists in "ancient wealth" coupled with fine manners, while Dante "himself" argues that it exists wherever there is virtue. Like Boethius before him, Dante addresses the topic *sub specie eternitatis* without raising questions about the relationship between gender differences and types of nobility; it was Chaucer's great, and greatly perturbing, achievement to ennoble a "foul and old" woman by putting in her mouth the magnificent words of "the wise poete of Florence." (Dant in drag. . .?)

Wel kan the wise poete of Florence,
That highte Dant, spoken in this sentence.
Lo, in swich maner rym is Dantes tale . . . (III(D) 1125–27)

The next two lines translate *Purgatorio* vii.121–23.³⁰⁰ But then Chaucer proceeds to use another (intriguingly unnamed) work of Dante's, *Il Convivio*. The influence of the *Convivio* on most of the moral excursus (which in its entirety occupies ll. 1109–76) may be posited, though some of the parallels which have been drawn are less convincing than others, and ll. 1118–24 and ll. 1152–58 could well be indebted to the *Roman de la Rose*.³⁰¹ Chaucer's emphasis on "old richesse" (1110, 1118) certainly sounds quite Dantean (cf. *antica possession*, *antica ricchezza*),³⁰² as does his consideration (and dismissal) of the notion that *gentillesse* may be "planted naturelly / Unto a certeyn lynage down the lyne" (1134–35). Indeed, the English poet's doctrine of "verray gentillesse of grace," to which we devoted so much attention above, might have been influenced by the way in which Dante asserted that God alone—who is no respecter of persons—can confer the ennobling gift of grace.³⁰³ Of course, Chaucer made certain additions, most notably the passage about fire retaining all its natural properties even if it is taken to "the derkeste hous / Bitwix this and the mount of Kaukasous." Arguably the most striking passage in the entire excursus, this does not come from the *Convivio* but seems to be Chaucer's personal assimilation of two passages which are found, far apart, in *De consolazione philosophiae*.³⁰⁴ Furthermore, such material as Chaucer did take from "Dant" was subjected to radical recontextualization, since the *Convivio* is not concerned with the problematic relationship between types of nobility and gender difference.

Despite those specific qualifications, is it nevertheless possible to confirm J. L. Lowes's conclusion that "the argument is Dante's argument," "the whole treatment" being "pervaded" with "the spirit of the *Convivio*"?³⁰⁵ I think not, given the fact that Chaucer accessed so little of the erudite and lengthy philosophizing which Dante had built on the Boethian base. That is to say, what Chaucer chose to take from the *Convivio* was argument and matter which was relatively close to what Dante had taken from the *Consolatio*, the Italian writer's Aristotelian elaborations being left behind.³⁰⁶ Chaucer seems interested in "Dant" at his least original. To rewrite Lowes's remark, then, "the argument is Boethius's argument," though admittedly n'er so well expressed as here—thanks partly to Dante, of course, but also to that other ardent student of Boethius, Jean de Meun. And let us never forget Chaucer's own (quite remarkable) command of the *Consolatio* itself.

As a craftsman who needed a disquisition on *gentillesse* to serve his elaborate design in the *Wife of Bath's Tale*, why did Chaucer turn to Dante, when he could have got all he needed from Boethius—particularly since, as I have just suggested, the relevant material from the *Convivio* is heavily dependent on Boethius, as the poet who first rendered the *Consolatio* into Middle English must have known full well? Some possible answers come to mind. Because the subject-matter presented him with an excellent opportunity to honor Dante, just as he had honored other contemporary Italian masters, "Fraunceys Petrak, the lauriat poete" and the canon lawyer Giovanni da Lignato, in the prologue to the *Clerk's Tale* (IV(E) 31–34), of which Petrarch's *De obedientia ac fide uxoria mythologia* is the primary source? Perhaps. Because he wished to display his cosmopolitan credentials, as a much-traveled poet with unique access to the riches of Italian literature, all those books which were closed to his more parochial compatriots? Perhaps. After all, Chaucer's much-vaunted self-denigration tends to weaken when he is in the company of Italians, as the ending of *Troilus and Criseyde* (a translation and transformation of Boccaccio's *Il Filostrato*) makes clear. Here Chaucer's "tragedie"—certainly not a "litel" book, by any measure—boldly goes where no English poem had gone before, to test the ground where one can see "pace" (walking, disputing, no doubt) those men of great authority, "Virgile, Ovyde, Omer, Lucan, and Stace" (*Troilus and Criseyde*, V, 1786–92). And he is not above making a catty remark about those poets among his English contemporaries who "rum, ram, ruf " by "lettre" (*Parson's Prologue*, X(I) 43). But let us continue with our review of possible answers. Did Chaucer extol "Dant" because of his desire to exalt the loathly damsel by giving her the most prestigious discourse available? Maybe, though this argument is less

convincing, since the old *auctores* “Valerius,” “Senek,” and “Boece” would have done the same job. Indeed, they *do* the same job when they are named at D(III) 1165–68, following the conclusion of the Dantean account. But why is that account given poll position, with Boethius *cum suis* being relegated to a merely supporting role?

An answer may be sought in the sensitivities which the subject-matter would or could have stirred in England in the 1390s. Troubling Wycliffite notions about dominion had been circulating for around twenty years, the first major move against them occurring in Pope Gregory IX’s anti-Wycliffite bull of 1377; they also feature among the propositions condemned at the Blackfriars Council of 1382, and in accusations leveled around the same time at Hereford, Rippingdon, Aston, and Swinderby. The power and danger of such doctrine has been emphasized by several modern historians. Kaminsky has spoken of “an ideology of revolution,”³⁰⁷ and Hurley of “theological dynamite, capable of blowing up the whole fabric of society, lay and ecclesiastical.”³⁰⁸ True, others have been less sensationalistic in their assessment of this and related Wycliffite doctrines—particularly Michael Wilks, who (as already noted) claims that Wyclif “took particular pleasure in indulging in lengthy speculation about divine possibilities,” knowing “full well that this speculation was to have no immediate results for human life.”³⁰⁹ That may well be true in fact, but in a climate of fear and suspicion such skepticism can seem like a luxury. Better to play safe, and Chaucer may have wished to do just that. The fact that the sources for his doctrine of true *nobilitas* were all impeccably orthodox would not necessarily have prevented prejudiced readers from mistrusting the resultant text, particularly since it had been allocated to the Wife of Bath, whose adventures in Scriptural exegesis and academic disputation were also potentially disquieting. The chronicler Knighton attacked Wyclif for having translated the Bible into English, thereby making it wide open to layfolk and enabling women to read doctrines that should be reserved to clerks who are appropriately literate and capable of understanding them well.³¹⁰ Chaucer’s character could have been read as a portrayal (or perhaps a caricature) of such a woman, particularly if, in the 1390s, “gossip” was circulating concerning Lollard women priests.³¹¹ Arguing that much of the Scriptural exegesis in question was largely Saint Jerome’s, as taken from the *Adversus Jovinianum*, would not have helped much, if at all; to the suspicious mind, Alisoun is making “argumentes . . . in holy writ” in a manner akin to what those “lewed” Lollard “calates” were doing, or supposed to be doing (cf. Hoccleve’s derisory remarks, as quoted on p. 25 above).³¹² If it walks like a duck, quacks like a duck . . . Perception is all.³¹³

Here, then, is a possible solution to our puzzle. Chaucer’s

ostentatious privileging of Dante may have been driven (at least in part) by selfpreservatory expediency. In implying that the Italian poet was the source of most of his information on the subject of *gentillesse*, he may have sought to distance it from the specific circumstances of contemporary England, to emphasize that, far from being confined within national boundaries, it was a matter of great interest in a land where “the English Heresy”³¹⁴ had not spread its poison. Such an explanation may also help us to understand some of the peculiarities of Chaucer’s citation of Dante. He does not identify the *Convivio* as a source. It is Dante’s poetry that is alluded to in the expression “in swich maner rym is Dantes tale” (III(D) 1127), this being the way in which Chaucer’s translation of three lines from the *Purgatorio* (vii.121–23) is introduced, preceding—and indeed masking—his use of material from the *Convivio*. Not only is the *Convivio* not named; neither is there mention of the fact that Chaucer has moved from Dante’s “rym” to draw on a text which is written mainly in prose,³¹⁵ and in vernacular prose at that. And there is no hint whatever of the highly innovative nature of that text. For Chaucer was not dealing with a Latin (or even vernacular) commentary on Boethius or some other ancient Latin *auctor*. The *Convivio* is a vernacular commentary on vernacular poems which were written by Dante himself.

But, did Chaucer really know what he was dealing with? It is just possible that he possessed only part of the *Convivio*, whether a fragmentary manuscript containing just the fourth tractate or a purple passage on *gentilezza* which someone had copied out for him, knowing his interest in the subject, or which Chaucer himself had copied out (or had a scribe copy for him), having had his attention drawn to it.³¹⁶ That would account for his imprecision concerning his source. I find it hard to believe, however, that this exceptionally well-traveled and cosmopolitan poet, who evidently knew and cared about Petrarch’s laureateship, could have been unaware of the true nature of his source-text or its cultural significance. For here vernacular poems are being treated with the scholarly deference which for generations had been the prerogative of the Latin *auctores*. The *Convivio* is a major testimony to the *translatio auctoritatis*, the transference of prestige from Latin to vernacular textuality which was a major feature of fourteenth-century European literature, with Italy leading the way. As I sought to explain in the Introduction to this present book, the religious and political conditions prevailing in Chaucer’s England were not conducive to the development of an orthodox and officially approved commentary tradition, given the general suspicion in which texts written in English came to be held and the fact that the Lollards had produced so much Scriptural exegesis *in vulgari* to accompany their Bible translation.³¹⁷ These reasons might help to account for

Chaucer's reticence about the textual context of Dante's discussion of *gentilezza*.

Furthermore, there are certain aspects of that discussion which, for the very same reasons, might have given Chaucer cause for concern. At *Convivio* IV, 14, Dante attacks those who believe that the lapse of time is necessary to create nobility or gentility. Those same "erring ones" also believe that a churl's son may never become noble—and here they contradict themselves by denying that it is "impossible by the passage of time to arrive at the moment when nobility is engendered."³¹⁸ That is to say, in order to support their position, the *erranti* would have to prove that nobility is engendered by some particular point of time—a certain moment is reached, and *gentilezza* results. Dante's position is that this is incorrect and hence impossible to prove: in fact, the potential for *gentilezza* is present in each and every one of us, whether aristocrat or churl, but we ourselves have to actualize that potential by behaving nobly. *È gentilezza dovunque è vertute . . .*³¹⁹ Because mankind has a common origin or root, any human being can cultivate the virtues and thus attain the true nobility, nobility of soul. The influence of Boethius is at once obvious and profound. "All human kind on earth arises from the same origin. . ." (*De consolatione philosophiae*, III met. vi, 1).³²⁰ There is, then, nothing to stop the Italian vernacular from building on its origins, which are as noble as they are natural, and attaining through careful refinement the greatness of that "virtuous operation which is its own proper excellence," to adapt a phrase from the *Convivio*, I, 10. Thereby the *prezioso volgare* can achieve perfect literary nobility—and also authority, which stems from reason (whether divine or human) rather than from age. That, I believe, is the clear implication of Dante's discourse. If Chaucer understood the *Convivio* in those terms, it was hardly in his best interest to spell them out.³²¹ For the argument had great potential as a defense of vernacular theology in general and the vernacular Bible in particular: the English language contains within itself the seed of nobility and prestige, and when that potential is realized through diligent cultivation, then its appropriateness as a repository of the word of God cannot be denied. Little wonder, then, that Chaucer's translation of the *Convivio* is confined to the phrases he needed to express anew a well-established doctrine of true nobility. Dantean self-commentary in the vernacular remained an Italian phenomenon, not announced and certainly not naturalized on English soil. Place *does* and *did* matter—despite the Boethian/Dantean argument to the contrary, and also Wyclif's very different one about the true Church being located everywhere and anywhere that the *praedestinati* may be found.

In the *Wife of Bath's Tale*, Chaucer chooses not to participate in

either Dante's radicalism or in Wyclif's, but instead seeks his own way: "I wot myself best how y stonde," as he remarks in *The House of Fame* (l. 1878). When Alisoun's older and wiser alter-ego discourses on *gentillesse* there is nothing ideologically innovative in her words, though their rhetorical power is undeniable. It is dominion of soul of which she speaks, rather than some principle of divine election through predestining gifts of divine grace; her teaching on sovereignty offers doctrine of unimpeachable orthodoxy. And here is where *Il Convivio* came in—to enable Chaucer to express aspects of his Boethian doctrine in a fresh manner. Anyone who knew anything about the treatise may not have found Chaucer's citation of it quite so innocent. But few, if any, of his less-traveled and less widely read compatriots could have occupied such a privileged position. And Chaucer himself was not willing or able to acknowledge the possible consequences of what the *Convivio* was and what it said. Hence this source is unnamed (being a site of suspicion and anxiety, as is the rapist knight with no name), though its illustrious author, Dante, is openly named, and commended. And this, I suggest, has the effect of lending distance and remoteness to the topic of *gentillesse*—universality too, no doubt, but that also entails the erosion of national boundaries and the erasure of local concerns. In short, it was the foreignness of "the wise poete of Florence" that Chaucer chose to exploit—this being the English poet's version of taking his material on *gentillesse* far, far away, toward the "mount of Kaukasous" (with the significance of the *Convivio* as source-text being hidden in "the derkeste hous"). Fire may still be fire in Dante's Italy, and hold its "office natureel." But it's been moved to a less inflammatory environment. Here, then, is what "Dant" may have done for Chaucer in the *Wife of Bath's Tale*.

For all these reasons, the Dantean material pulls Chaucer's narrative well away from the *donnés* of medieval romances which involve encounters between fairies and humans and/or the fairy enchantment of humans. There the denizens of the Other World are frequently portrayed as deceitful and even deadly. But the doctrine of *gentillesse* taught by Alisoun's morally impeccable *vetula* is neither devalued nor demeaned by its enclosure within a fairy-tale narrative. Rather the point at which the old, ugly, but virtuous hag, in bed with the young but vicious man whom she has coerced into marriage, makes him listen to a long and learned lecture, is the defining radical moment of Chaucer's text. The nameless knight is outclassed in terms of true nobility and he knows it; in an extraordinary passage he recognizes and respects the moral superiority of the woman he is now proud to call his wife. He may ponder ("avyseth hym"), and sorely sigh over (III(D) 1228), the difficult choice she has just presented him

with, but there is nothing in the surprising, indeed moving, lines he eventually utters to indicate that he has been browbeaten into submission in the way in which the Wife of Bath selfishly “governed” (219) her old husbands.

“My lady and my love, and wyf so deere,
I put me in youre wise governance;
Cheseth youreself which may be moost plesaunce
And moost honour to yow and me also.
I do no fors the wheither of the two,
For as yow liketh, it suffiseth me.” (1230–35)

Following this extraordinary declaration of respect for and deference to his “wyf so deere,” the lady herself asks, then have I got mastery over you? and he replies, Yes, certainly, wife; I hold it best. And here is real mastery: sovereignty of soul, a spiritual dominance so manifest that it can be accepted without reservation.

At this point, it should be remembered, the knight is not looking into the eyes of a beautiful eighteen-year-old, as in Gower’s *Tale of Florent*; as far as he knows, he is in bed with a “loothly” and “oold” hag who physically disgusts him (his feelings being made abundantly clear at D(III) 1058–1103). While it is true that Florent is also obliged to think hard about his choice, there seems to be less pressure upon him—the close proximity of his “lyves hele” (I, 1821) is palpable, and his wish for her to “be my maistresse” (*Confessio amantis*, I, 1825) sounds like a courtly love term of endearment rather than a concession of dominion. In contrast, the anti-hero of Alisoun’s tale has no idea that corporeal transformation is a possibility for his wife, not having been granted a pre-question “preview” of the kind enjoyed by Florent in Gower’s version (I, 1798–805) and by Gawain in both *The Wedding of Sir Gawain and Dame Ragnelle* (640–42) and *The Marriage of Sir Gawain*.³²² Hence the moral issue—is beauty preferable to wifely fidelity?—is presented in quite stark terms. Calling her his “love” takes on a quite different significance in Chaucer’s text—it must be her beauty of soul rather than of body which the callow youth finds attractive; his words seem to exceed mere gallantry.

Here, then, the narrative’s values seem to go beyond the body, however briefly. And the fact that this unlikely “love” and “lady” is allowed to resolve such a major issue, the outcome of which will profoundly affect the young man’s own life, is all the more striking. Indeed, the knight accepts that she is wise enough to make the crucial decision for both of them—and eminently capable of acting in a way which will redound to their mutual “honour.” That phrase recalls Jankyn’s words of submission to Alisoun:

“Myn owene trewe wyf,
Do as thee lust the terme of al thy lyf;

But the *rapprochement* of that much odder couple, the loathy damsel and the rapist-knight, has been achieved with greater speed and relative ease. (This is, after all, a fairy-tale situation, far from the “tribulacion in mariage” (173) which the Wife of Bath has both inflicted and suffered.) Indeed, the knight’s words recall the discourse of mutual respect and deference which permeates the *Tale of Melibee*, wherein the mighty and rich Melibeus gradually comes to accept the superior wisdom of his wife Prudence.

“. . . wyf, by cause of thy sweete wordes, and eek for I have assayed and preved thy grete sapience and thy grete trouthe, I wol governe me by thy conseil in alle thing.”³²³

“Dame,” quod Melibee, “dooth youre wil and youre likynge; for I putte me hoolly in youre disposicioun and ordinaunce.”³²⁴

Chaucer could hardly have set this tale up better—with reference to the Four Evangelists who, each in his own way, narrated the greatest story ever told, about “the peyne of Jhesu Crist” (VII(B2) 943–12). And the teaching of Dame Prudence rises to the heights of the virtue which she personifies so well. The fact that we can draw an analogy between the ways in which the (radically different) husbands in the *Tale of Melibee* and the *Wife of Bath’s Tale* place themselves under the “wise governance” of their wives, is proof positive of the respect which Chaucer sought for Alisoun’s older (and wiser) *alter ego*, at the crucial point in her narrative.

It is true that initially Melibee professes reluctance to take advice from a woman and cede “power” to her (“Every wight wolde holde me thane a fool,” he grumbles). Even in the neverland of personification, it seems, no opportunity to affirm normative gender-roles can be let slip. One may compare the way in which Jean de Meun’s Amant was shocked by dirty words in the mouth of that beautiful young woman, Dame Raison.³²⁵ In Chaucer’s text also, a personification is being read (for a brief moment of textual time) as an ordinary woman. But of course, Prudence is no ordinary woman but an Impossible She, created through allegorical possession of the female form. Perhaps it is her very unreality which makes the authoritative position which she commands over her husband’s moral choices more acceptable in the “real” world.

But the values of the “real” world impinge on the way in which Prudence’s teaching (for Melibee certainly regards his wife’s counsel as such) is contextualized within Chaucer’s treatise. It takes place in the private space of the family home, and when Prudence shows her husband’s adversaries the error of their ways this is done likewise in “a pryvee place” well out of the public eye.³²⁶ In persuading Melibee to listen to her, Prudence cites as precedents four Biblical women (Rebekah, Judith, Abigail, and Esther) who did not presume to preach

or teach publicly, but advised their relatives and leaders in a discreet manner. The loathly damsel's bedtime lecture to her reluctant husband seems to fall within the same category: one can hardly get a more private performance than that. Indeed, the notion of privacy is emphasized in the statement that the marriage of this ill-matched couple took place "prively" in the morning (III(D) 1080).³²⁷ And yet: the Pardoner's designation of its narrator as a noble preacher (however ironically intended), and the Friar's recommendation that the Canterbury company should leave the *auctoritees* to the experts and speak merely of game, suggest other interpretive possibilities. The Friar's plea follows not the Wife's prologue but the Wife's tale, as a response to the expert appropriation of authorities which characterizes her entire performance—that being a technique which, or course, had its usual context in the public spaces of church and school. Chaucer is, as it were, "publishing" (in the sense of "making public") the old woman's private instruction, by couching it in terms and techniques which were the prerogatives of the *praedicator* and the *lector*. Furthermore, this is done in a way which draws attention to the public origins and associations of those very terms and techniques—and indeed challenges the traditional basis of the distinction between public and private, as I now hope to show.

Publishing the Private

An excellent example of a "public" term being transferred to the "private" sphere may be found in a passage in Thomas of Chobham's *Summa confessorum* which advises wives to be preachers (*predicatrices*) to their husbands.³²⁸ When priests are instructing women after confession, they should encourage them to teach their husbands to live better lives, given that no priest can soften a man's heart as effectively as his wife can. Chobham envisages a woman lying in bed, in her husband's arms, talking to him softly, doing everything in her power to improve his conduct. If he is hard, merciless, and an oppressor of the poor, she should encourage him to be compassionate. If he is avaricious, she should arouse in him generosity, and secretly dispense alms from their common possessions—thus she should provide the gifts which he neglects to give. It is perfectly permissible for a wife to act in this way, Chobham declares, with her husband being ignorant of what she is doing. Though he does not say so in so many words, this cleric expects wives to at once "preach" to their husbands and practice what they preach in their own lives.

Here, of course, the vocabulary of preaching and "preacheresses" is being used in a loose or metaphorical sense, and private rather than public instruction is assumed. This is teaching within the home, there being no question whatever of the *magisterium* of preaching or

teaching having been usurped. Chobham's admonition is one among many medieval recommendations that women should guide their husbands into leading better lives, a form of advice-giving which anticipates the later "woman as angel of the house" discourse.³²⁹ Nevertheless, it is well seen that he was writing in the second decade of the thirteenth century. Had Chobham lived around the end of the fourteenth, surely he would have been more cautious in his remarks on the preaching of layfolk. No doubt things looked very different in the mid-1390s, when Chaucer was creating the Wife of Bath. At that later time, Chobham's use of the dangerous term *predicatrices*—taken from a highly sensitive discourse-domain, that of "official," public teaching and preaching—could well have rendered his moral admonition problematic.

Chaucer seems to have been acutely aware of such sensitivities. True, he had no apparent qualms about using terms relating to *prechyng* in loose senses, as when Jankyn is said to "preche" from his book of wicked wives (III (D) 641) and Alisoun's old husbands are accused of preaching to her about female shortcomings (247, 367, 436–37). But when the context presents the possibility of a technical, formal sense (designating an authorized and authoritative public activity), he can be remarkably circumspect, as may be illustrated with reference to the *Man of Law's Tale* and *Second Nun's Tale*. The principal source of the former, the Anglo-Norman chronicle written by Nicholas Trevet around 1334, tells how, when a group of Syrian merchants arrive in Rome, the emperor's daughter Constance preaches the Christian faith to them (*lour prescha la fey Cristienn*) and they are converted. Whereupon Constance has them baptized and "instructed perfectly in the faith (*les fist baptizer e enseiner parfitement en la fei Iesu Christ*)."³³⁰ It would seem, then, that she initiates the process of converting the infidels, but soon passes them on to the proper authorities—to Roman priests, we may assume; men who are ordained and have the legal right to exercise the *magisterium docendi/praedicandi*. In contrast, at this point in his version of the narrative, Chaucer does not allow Constance even an initial preaching role. The merchants simply hear of her beauty and goodness, there being no specification of the source of her "vertu." Admittedly, her "hoolynesse" is mentioned, but that follows her identification as a "mirour of alle curteisye," and comes near the end of a list of fine qualities which are common to Christian and heathen alike (II(B1) 155–68). Having merely "sayn" Constance (172)—there is no suggestion whatever of any verbal communication having taken place—the merchants return home to sing her praises, whereupon the Sultan falls in love with her. Later in the narrative, we see Constance converting pagan Britons through private instruction, and during her

public trial before King Alla God intervenes to strike dead Constance's false accuser and proclaim her innocence of the crime of murder though a "voys . . . herd in general audience" (673). Here, then, it is God Himself who performs in public. Little wonder that "for this miracle" the king and many others "in that place" are converted—though some credit is given to Constance's "mediacioun," whatever that was.³³¹ Did it involve speech, an act of preaching which spelled out the significance of this miracle, or had Chaucer in mind a spectacle in which Constance played a major, albeit largely passive, role, as a mediator or instrument of the divine will?

Chaucer's imprecision here speaks volumes—particularly since it is of a piece with his treatment of the martyr Saint Cecilia, who in the *Second Nun's Tale* is allowed a preaching role, but in carefully controlled circumstances.³³² On their wedding night, in bed with Valerian, the man she has been forced to marry, Cecilia instructs him "prively" (VIII(G) 143) concerning her vocation, revealing that a guardian angel will strike him dead if he should seek anything other than "clene love" with her (141–61). For this is to be a spiritual marriage,³³³ in contrast with Constance's—concerning which the Man of Law remarks that, "thogh that wyves be ful hooly thynges" nevertheless they must "take in pacience at nyght"

Swiche manere necessities as been plesynges
To folk that han ywedded hem with rynges,
And leye a lite hir hoolynesse aside,
As for the tyme—it may no bet betide. (II(B1) 709–14)

Even sharper is the contrast with the sexual bliss that follows the wedding-night lecture in the *Wife of Bath's Tale*, when the wife's vetular doctrine seems to be set aside wholly rather than just "a lite," and perpetually rather than for a short period of "tyme." Chastity helps guarantee "hoolynesse," as our previous chapter has made abundantly clear, and at once highlights and justifies the exceptional circumstances in which a woman may presume to preach. Cecilia starts off modestly enough by preaching to Valerian's brother Tiburce (following Valerian's baptism by Pope Urban):

Tho gan she hym ful busily to preche
Of Cristes come, and of his peynes teche (342–43)

Subsequently, thanks to her "wise loore" the officers who are sent to force her to sacrifice to Jupiter also become Christians (414–16). But her apotheosis as *praedicatrix* does not come until the time of her martyrdom. Half-dead, with her head partially severed from her body, she manages to teach and preach for three whole days:

. . . nevere cessed hem the feith to teche
That she hadde fostred; hem she gan to preche. . . (538–39)

Thus Cecilia's specially privileged position is dramatically, indeed shockingly, established. And "the privileges of a few do not constitute common law," to quote yet again one of the Vadstena sermons in praise of St. Bridget.³³⁴ Here, then, is no role-model for ordinary women, whose status remains unchanged.

Indeed, Cecilia's own actions endorse and support the established economy of the Christian sacraments, as when, following the conversion by Valerian and Tiburce of the head-prefect Maximus and a team of torturers,³³⁵ she promptly brings priests to this gathering, so that all may be christened (372–80). Chaucer is not in the business of subverting the doctrine that, if at all possible, the sacrament of baptism should be administered by ordained officials. In the exceptional and fraught circumstances appertaining at this point in his narrative, lay baptism would probably have been deemed quite acceptable (to judge from the expert opinions cited in Chapter 1 above). But Chaucer was not willing to take such a risk.³³⁶

Even more circumspect is the way in which his Cecilia asks the "hevene kyng" that

"I myghte do werche
Heere of myn hous perpetually a cherche." (VIII(G) 545–46)

To clarify this convoluted phrasing, she is praying that she might have her house made perpetually into a church (i.e., that it should become, and remain, a church). And this prayer is answered:

Hir hous the chirche of Seint Cecilie highte;
Seint Urban halwed it, as he wel myghte;
In which, into this day, in noble wyse,
Men doon to Crist and to his seint servyse. (551–53).³³⁷

Saint Urban "wel myghte" do this deed; as a bishop, he is legally empowered to perform the consecration of Cecilia's house.

The care that Chaucer is taking here may be appreciated even better if it is contrasted with the way the same event is handled in John Wyclif's *Trialogus*.³³⁸ Here the cantankerous Pseustis (who is rarely right) accuses Phronesis (who is never wrong) of departing from both the Church and from Scripture in supposing that a layman may confect the Eucharist as well as a priest—thereby introducing major confusion in respect of whose host should be worshipped. The Church has spent too little time in considering this matter, retorts Phronesis, due to her inappropriate interest in temporal things. However, he himself is willing to admit the possibility that layfolk can confect, and indeed that they can consecrate, as in the case of St. Cecilia, who consecrated her house as a church. Furthermore, it is impossible to rule out the possibility that when (as reported at Acts 2: 46) Christians broke bread from house to house, the bread broken was the body of

Christ, and that others apart from the Apostles and presbyters did so. Uncertainty exists here, and Wyclif seems quite willing to leave the matter unresolved, though he goes on to have Phronesis affirm that the *officium* of confecting the Eucharist is appropriate to holy priests, since Christ specially commanded them to fulfill it, saying “This do for the commemoration of me” (I Corinthians 11:24). Only when Christ works together with a man is the sacrament confected—something which present-day priests would do well to remember, Phronesis warns.³³⁹ Why, one might ask? Because immoral priests should not take it for granted that Christ will always work with them,³⁴⁰ and/or because Christ may well work with men who are not ordained priests, as the Acts passage allows us to suspect?

Focusing now on the significance of Phronesis’s reference to St. Cecilia: here Wyclif uses her to prove “that the laity could perform minor sacraments like consecrations,” suggests Sherry Reames.³⁴¹ However, the consecration of a church is not itself a sacrament (nowadays it is usually called a “sacramental”) because, since a building is inanimate, it cannot receive divine grace; rather, such an action makes a building a fit and proper place for the sacraments to be administered.³⁴² The crucial point for our purposes, however, is that Wyclif is by no means thinking of relatively “minor” matters. Cecilia’s alleged consecration is the thin end of an argumentative wedge, the thick end of which is the *possibility* (Phronesis will go no further) that in certain cases layfolk may consecrate the supreme sacrament of the Eucharist. Here, then, is the somewhat ambivalent, but certainly sensitive, context in which Wyclif places *Seinte Cecile*. There is no ambiguity in Chaucer’s version. He has Cecilia express the *wish* that her house should be consecrated a church; she does not presume to do it herself. A few lines later, it is made quite clear that this rite was performed by the ordained and impeccably authoritative Urban. Far from transforming Cecilia into a figure “as threatening . . . as Wyclif” (as Lynn Staley Johnson has suggested),³⁴³ Chaucer keeps her well away from the subversive possibilities that Wyclif had explored.

The *Second Nun’s Tale* therefore seems to support the orthodox consensus that it is impossible for a woman to go beyond her female body (in this life at least), inasmuch as the impediment of sex is always there, barring her from the priestly prerogative of consecration (whether of sacramentals or sacraments) and ensuring that any preaching she undertakes is fully justified by special circumstances. Cecilia is carefully marked as an exceptional case that lacks the power to serve as a general precedent for future action.

How specially privileged, then, is Alisoun of Bath’s wise old woman, and does her teaching on *gentillesse* offer anything to women in general? First and foremost, there is no suggestion that this *vetula* is

adopting a formal preaching role; she “comes in no pulpytt,” to recall a phrase from Margery Kempe’s book.³⁴⁴ Her instruction is firmly located in the domestic, private sphere; it is *amicabiliter*, *familiariter*, and *in silentio*, a matter of moral *comownycacyon*. This is hardly surprising, given the caution and conservatism that we have found in the *Man of Law’s Tale* and *Second Nun’s Tale*. But Chaucer goes farther in the *Wife of Bath’s Tale*. What sets Alisoun’s female pedagogue apart is the way in which she earns, and is awarded, *maistrie*—a process far more momentous than the physical possession which is such a major feature of the traditional “loathly damsel” story. There the manly virtue of the best knight available provided the moral center and the narrative pivot. Uniquely, Chaucer’s version presents a wise and wonderful old woman asserting her natural moral superiority over a repugnant young man who committed an act of violent rape. Many narrative details coalesce to make that superiority crystal-clear. The knight swears by his “trouthe” that he will repay her (for gaining the right answer to the question about what “women moost desire”) with the “next thyng” that she asks of him (1007, 1010). So, he has no idea of what is in store for him, in contrast with Gower’s *Tale of Florent* (I, 1551–60) and *The Wedding of Sir Gawain and Dame Ragnelle* (279–90, cf. 336–47)³⁴⁵ where the condition is made known at the outset. This, to be sure, is entrapment—but entrapment of a very different kind from that practiced in the traditional “loathly damsel” narrative. Other loathly damsels need to ensnare good knights because only good ones will effect their liberation: Alisoun’s character has to reel in her unsavory catch slowly lest he should seek to escape. The clear implication is that he cannot be trusted with advance knowledge of the consequences of his agreement. When the ignorant knight appears at Arthur’s court to receive judgment from the queen, “the olde wyf ” is there to hear him use her (correct) answer; whereupon she announces publicly, in front of everyone, that in recompense he must marry her. She is taking no chances.

And with good reason. Her husband-to-be lacks not only a name but also any heroic credentials, there being no mention of any redeeming qualities or ameliorating achievements (such as feats of arms or bravery in battle, for instance). What has he ever done, apart from violently rape a woman? He’s not even described as handsome. Put like this, one can only wonder why Alisoun’s virtuous *vetula* would wish to bother with him. He seems to have nothing to offer her; why should he be the one chosen to break the spell? (That, however, is an aspect of the traditional narrative which seems unimportant to Chaucer—on which, more later.) All that appears to have brought them together is his need for an answer to the question, what do women most desire? To which her answer is, of course, sovereignty

over men. But the “maistrie” which she subsequently gains from him, so she can “chese and governe” as she likes (1236–37), is hardly a gift from a superior to an inferior but rather a recognition of the proper order of things. She is “sovereyn” because she deserves to be.

The titular hero of the *Tale of Melibee* had (initially) hesitated to give his wife Prudence the “maistrie” over him, quoting the statement of “Jhesus Syrak” that, “if the wyf have maistrie, she is contrarious to hir housbonde.”³⁴⁶ Likewise, in the *Parson’s Tale* may be found the assertion that, where the woman has the mastery, there is too much confusion. Christ did not make Eve out of the head of Adam, “for she sholde nat clayme to greet lordshipe. For ther as the womman hath the maistrie, she maketh to muche destray.”³⁴⁷ However, in Alisoun’s narrative the woman is morally the head of the man, and can with reason claim mastery. And Melibee’s misgivings carry no weight here either. Dame Prudence had saved her husband’s blushes by assuring him that his “maistrie” was intact: if a man were counseled only by those who have “lordshipe and maistrie of his persone,” then he would receive little counsel. Thus Prudence tactfully assumes the subject-position, her point being that as a woman and a wife she does *not* possess such power. But in the *Wife of Bath’s Tale* it is the husband who rightly assumes the subject-position, given that his wife possesses the highest kind of “lordshipe and maistrie”—not “of his persone” (for that involves material lordship and gender/social status) but rather of his mind and soul, specifically the aspects thereof which guide his “free choys”³⁴⁸ in the right moral direction.

The male sex is more noble than the female, St. Thomas Aquinas (among many others) had declared, though elsewhere he admitted that in certain cases a woman can be found who is better than many men as far as the state of her soul is concerned.³⁴⁹ (Which does *not* mean, to be sure, that such a woman can be ordained or undertake the *officium praedicatoris*— this being the orthodox view, from which Chaucer shows no sign of deviating.) The Wife of Bath’s wise old woman is, it may be argued, one of those cases. Furthermore, the *vetula*’s statements on *gentillesse* (that being the main topic of her moral excursus) constitute a discourse of inclusion: this most unusual of authority-figures is not merely justifying herself as an exceptional case but rather holding out the prospect of true nobility to all women (and indeed to all men). For genuine *gentillesse* comes from God and is available to everyone; only those who obscure the divine image in themselves become churlish. *Vicio fit homo ignobilis: sola autem virtute nobilis*. This doctrine of “verray gentillesse of grace” is quite different from the language of unnatural, miraculous selection which allowed the authorization of a select number of holy women (the *electae et privilegiatae*, as Eustace of Arras called them) while leaving other

members of the sex exactly where they were and always had been.³⁵⁰ Even more forcefully than in Jean de Meun's tale of Croesus and Phanie, the possibility of a *magistra nobilitatis* is being admitted. Here is a marvelous celebration of female virtue which makes the point that the highest moral teaching may be "published" through a woman—a secular version, so to speak, of St. Bridget's claim to have been chosen by Christ to publish (*publicari*) her rule, as ably propounded by Cardinal Adam Easton.³⁵¹

The words of Alisoun of Bath's great-souled creation transcend the private, domestic, and "familial" arrangements which William of Aragon had seen as defining the sphere within which women could achieve their gendered *nobilitas*. For they have relevance in the wider world, not merely in the "economic" arena (in Aristotelian terms, i.e., the world of familial activity and household management). That, to be sure, was the context in which Thomas of Chobham had imagined the good wife counseling her wayward husband—an activity to which he sought to add luster by calling it "preaching." Thus Chobham imported a public term into the private, "economic" sphere; Chaucer went a lot further in problematizing the standard distinction between private and public by placing within the private sphere (of the improbable couple's bedchamber) doctrine with such moral challenge and universal potency that those narrow parameters are put under considerable pressure. It is not simply that the Wife of Bath is broadcasting this doctrine to a mixed audience of Canterbury pilgrims. Such proselytizing could be called teaching in private and *amicabiliter*—a considerable semantic stretch, to be sure, but one quite precedented in late-medieval attempts to protect the public, hierarchically authorized activities of preaching and scholastic teaching. It is rather that Chaucer's doctrine in itself applies to both private and public spheres, holds good across the different subject areas of ethics, economics, and politics, and cuts across distinctions of class and gender. Here, then, is the crucial sense in which Chaucer may be said to have "published" the private.

In this context "publication" should be understood as the transmission of information into "a public sphere of discussion, debate, news, gossip, and rumour, in which things were generally spoken of and generally known" (to return to Felicity Riddy's helpful discussion).³⁵² A contested and dangerous sphere, to be sure—for "making common" could result in scandal, embarrassment, devaluation, or self-denigration, as the etymological explanations of Hugutio of Pisa and Giovanni de'Balbi of Genoa help to make clear,³⁵³ and we may also recall Thomas of Chobham's warning that exposing certain sins is like baring one's bottom in public.³⁵⁴ Chaucer is acutely aware of this negative sense of the term when he follows up Criseyde's

heartrending foretelling of her own future shame—

“Allas, of me, unto the worldes ende,
Shal neyther ben ywriten nor ysonge
No good word, for thise bokes wol me shende.
O, rolled shal I ben on many a tonge!” (*Troilus and Criseyde*, V, 1058–61)

—with the confirmation that posterity treated her in precisely that way. Indeed, the “publication” of Criseyde’s guilt has been so debilitating that Chaucer refuses to participate in the process.

Hire name, allas, is *publyssed* so wide
That for hire gilt it oughte ynough suffice. (V, 1095–96)

In the case of the *Wife of Bath’s Tale*, however, a different kind of “publication” is in process. Chaucer causes the wisdom of old women “Foorth to go among the peple” (to borrow a phrase from Thomas Hoccleve),³⁵⁵ and there is nothing scandalous, embarrassing, or devaluing about it. Rather it counters the obscene embarrassments of other aspects of Chaucer’s text, and rises above the low valuation of the *vetula* in particular, and of female corporeality in general, which was ubiquitous in Chaucer’s day. The poet was unwilling to maintain the spatial definitions of public and private (pulpit and schoolroom versus home and nunnery), *pace* the Friar’s wish to have those comforting categories restored. Instead he envisages “a discursive public sphere” in “which individuals can identify common goods and participate in discussion of matters of common concern.”³⁵⁶ The loathly damsel’s identification of true gentility as a common good, her powerful discussion of this major matter of common concern, afford clear evidence of that.

Furthermore, despite what William of Aragon had to say, it would appear that women and men can be equally noble not just “proportionately speaking” but in simple and absolute terms. And married women, as much as anyone else, have the potential to achieve *nobilitas virtutis* and enjoy the praise (*laus proprie virtutis*) which exceptional personal virtue brings. This is a far cry from the way in which Eustace of Arras had singled out married women as members of the “common state of women” in a particularly demeaning way, declaring that, when St. Paul said that women should not preach or teach, he had in mind married women.³⁵⁷ Little wonder that when the devil tempted Catherine of Siena to consider marriage, on the grounds that there are many married saints (and hence, it is implied, her own aspirations to saintliness would not suffer in any way), he was vigorously rebuffed—Catherine was all too aware of the threat to her spiritual mission which marriage presented.³⁵⁸ Such was the widespread prejudice, and contemporary exceptions like Bridget of Sweden and Angela of Foligno could not shake it, any more than could

stories of exemplary wives like the Biblical Abigail, Deborah, Esther, Hannah, Rebekah, and Sarah, and indeed the legendary Constance (whose tale Chaucer presumably took as historical truth). However, in the *Wife of Bath's Prologue* we see how marriage, far from being an impediment to female teaching, has given one woman the expertise which she needs to speak with considerable authority on that very subject (with much help from the relevant *auctoritates*, and from her husband's instruction in how to allege them, to be sure—for Alisoun's scholastic technique lifts her beyond the level of a grotesque exaggeration designed to provoke mockery and complacent dismissal). And the *Wife of Bath's Tale* puts yet more authoritative statements in the mouth of another female figure—who gets married in the course of the narrative.

But there's the rub. Following her marriage she relinquishes her pedagogic position, thereby affording a striking illustration of the (supposed) incompatibility of marriage and the *magisterium docendi*. With a nod and a wink, Alisoun's paragon of virtue implies that all this wondrous but weighty doctrine may be a bit hard for her husband to bear. She knows a way out!

But nathelees, syn I knowe yore delit,
I shal fulfillle youre worldly appetit. (III(D) 1217–18)

The authority-figure then performs a sort of striptease, throwing off her moral garb to transform into a wife who is, admittedly, both fair *and* good, but the final emphasis seems to be placed on the fact that she is good in bed:

A thousand tyme a-rewe he gan hire kisse,
And she obeyed hym in every thyng
That myghte doon hym plesance or likyng. (1254–56)

The mind boggles. No wonder that the knight's heart bathes in a bath of bliss. Presumably there is a pun here on “the Wife of Bath.” The Wife certainly wishes to associate herself with this sexual plenitude, for she goes on to make a general prayer for husbands just like him: may “Jhesu Crist us sende / Housbondes meeke, yonge, and fressh abedde” (1258–59). Whereupon we are reminded that she, too, is in the market for (yet another) husband. Ovidian sexuality and satire are back in position; the strident tones of Jean de Meun's *Vielle* are heard once more. Business as usual.

In particular, the tale's rapid and highly reductive ending can be read as a normalization of the troubling situation in the Wife's prologue, where Alisoun had engaged in academic debate with confidence and considerable effectiveness. We have moved, with almost indecent haste, a very long way— from an opinionated, ageing *doctrix* to a submissive young wife. It might appear that the vicious

knight has got off very lightly; presenting him with a beautiful and sexually vigorous partner seems a curious punishment for his crime of rape. But there is another way to read that episode. One may recall Ovid's infamous claim that women actually want men to force them to have sexual intercourse, since "they often wish to give unwillingly what they like to give" (*Ars amatoria*, i.673–74). In the case of the rapes of Phoebe and Hilaira, Ovid continues, "each ravisher found favour with the ravished" (679–80). A similar outcome marks the highly popular Latin "comedy" known as the *Pamphilus*.³⁵⁹ Despite her loud protestations during the rape itself (681–96), the heroine Galatea seems perfectly willing to marry the man who has used violence against her (and Venus assures us that Galatea preferred to lose her virginity by force rather than inviting Pamphilus to take her if he wished).³⁶⁰ Further proof of women's secret admiration of forceful males (which modesty prevents them from admitting) may be found in the fact that, in the Wife's tale, it is the women of King Arthur's court who urge clemency in judging the rapist-knight, in contrast to their menfolk who want him executed (III(D) 889–98).³⁶¹ Of course, Chaucer does not present the rape-victim as marrying her ravisher. What is important here is the assumption—so ubiquitous in the period that it does not require any comment from Chaucer—that the knight's taking of a "maydenhed" by "verray force" (888) does not in any way problematize his subsequent marriage—to another woman, in this case. On the contrary, here we may find a perfect illustration of how marriage can direct desire into restraining and socially acceptable channels—that being one of the institution's most important functions, as our discussion earlier in this chapter has indicated. According to some Lollards, this function was so effective that, were marriage allowed to clergymen and religious women, it would enable them to avoid the grievous sins of fornication, homosexuality, and murder. The Wycliffite treatise *Of prelates* fulminates against certain hypocritical prelates who "kepen neiþer matrimoyne ne charite, but defoulen wyues, maidenen, widewis & nunnes in eche manere of lecherie, & children ben morþerid, & synne aȝenst kynde is not clene fled." ³⁶² Perhaps Chaucer's (far more modest and certainly orthodox) assumption was that it was better for the "lusty bachelor" (883) to marry than to burn in a way which would get him, and others, into even more trouble. The *Parson's Tale*, in explaining how "matrimoyne" is a "remedie agayns leccherie," affirms that it constitutes a "leefful assemblynge of man and of womman," the "trewe effect" of which is the cleansing of "fornicioun" and the transformation of "deedly synne into venial synne bitwixe hem that been ywedded, and [it] maketh the hertes al oon of hem that been ywedded, as wel as the bodies." Marriage seems to do precisely that in the *Wife of Bath's Tale*,

since the knight and his transformed bride “lyve unto hir lyves ende / In parfit joye” (1257–58).

So, then, the question may be posed, did Chaucer’s text finally sell out to the status quo of traditional gender-roles, the typology of obscene *vetulae* and oversexed widows, and the standard justification of marriage? Or, was this method of ending the tale inevitable?

To some extent, given Chaucer’s choice of narrative, it *was* inevitable. He could hardly have invented literary tradition all on his own. Just as Criseyde has to be unfaithful to Troilus at the end of *Troilus and Criseyde* (despite the extraordinary rehabilitation of the *ferfulleste wight* undertaken earlier in the poem), so too the loathly damsel must revert to type, become the golden girl she once was. That is what the story demands. But at this point Chaucer’s obfuscatory skills brilliantly come into play. His post-transformation account of the spellbound maiden is a masterpiece of minimalism. There is no explanation of how she came to be enchanted in the first place, no wicked stepmother to blame it on (as in Gower’s *Tale of Florent* and the two relevant *Gawain* romances). Any less detail, and the narrative would stall. Any more, and the old woman’s teaching would be undermined, since a woman who turned out to be ostentatiously aristocratic, rich, young, and beautiful would make an unconvincing advocate for poverty, ugliness, and *gentillesse* by merit alone. Such blatant hypocrisy would leave the wise old woman’s moral integrity in tatters.

Particularly striking here is Chaucer’s silence on the matter of the damsel’s social origins and congenital income bracket. The snobbish young rapist had, we may recall, complained about his enforced marriage on three counts—his wife was “loothly,” “oold” and came from a “lough . . . kynde” (1100–1101). In response she had promised to “amende *al* this” (1106, *italics mine*). Her loathsomeness and old age are indeed taken care of (though little time is expended on description of the process), but there is no attempt to “amend” the problem of her lowly status. That, I believe, is due to Chaucer’s awareness of the crucial importance of *nobilitas virtutis* within the damsel’s moral excursus, and his wish to have its potency survive the demands of the tale’s ending. The old crone, about to reveal herself to her husband (as they lie together in bed at night) as a “fair” and “yong” wife, assures him that “to-morn” she will be

. . .as fair to seene

As any lady, emperice, or queene,

That is bitwixe the est and eke the west. . . (1245–47)

That “as” is crucial—the loathly damsel is not saying that she *will* become a high-ranking “lady, emperice, or queene,” simply that she will *look* like one.

Here, incidentally, one may detect a palimpsest of the original tale showing through Chaucer's overwriting: the question of whether the reluctant husband prefers his bride to be fair by day or fair by night. Chaucer's temporary *vetula* seems to be reassuring the knight that she will be fair both night and day, this being the happy resolution of a problem he had not been presented with in the first place. It would seem that, unlike the loathly damsel herself, certain aspects of the traditional tale resist transformation. But Chaucer has managed to effect a major change, in his occlusion of the matter of whether she is *gentil* by birth as well as in deed. The contrast with Shakespeare's *The Winter's Tale* is enlightening. Although fostered in a shepherd's cottage, Perdita acts in ways which smack "of something greater than herself," seeming to be "too noble for this place." The play proceeds to reveal that she is a king's daughter rather than a mere "queen of curds and cream" (act. IV, sc. iv). Such a revelation is absent from Chaucer's text. For all we know, the Wife's loathly damsel shares the humble origins of the Clerk's Grisilda; both of them could be read as illustrations of the truth that "under low degree" is "ofte vertu hid" (IV(E) 425–26). Of course, Chaucer does not actually say that she is low-born (and anyone who knows the traditional tale would assume that she is not): but neither does he rule out the possibility. And that is enough to preserve the credibility and dignity of the wise old woman's disquisition on true gentility and the blessings of poverty and ugliness. Given that he cannot (or has chosen not to) invent a new narrative form from scratch, Chaucer goes as far as he can with the old one, skillfully avoiding the black rocks which threaten the frail bark he has constructed so carefully.

Can such a corporeal creature as the Wife of Bath, or her learned but physically loathly creation, be an effective teacher? Can nobility of soul really win out, given all the vices and blemishes to which female flesh is heir, and in view of all the sins actually committed by Alisoun? Can an immoral, indeed obscene, person tell a moral tale? Such are the questions which the dissonances of authority and fallibility, *officium* and office-holder, hieratic *ordo* and unstable human institution, posed for Chaucer. And his answers seem to be in the affirmative. The immorality of a preacher/teacher is not necessarily an impediment to the authority of his doctrine. That was the orthodox view, and he seems to have gone along with it—to devastating effect in the construction of his deviant Pardoner. When he adumbrates the (arguably) concomitant view, that the *corpus* and corporeality of a *doctrix* do not necessarily constitute an impediment to the authority of her doctrine, he is on rather more dangerous ground.³⁶³

But not for long. The gender-inverting charivari of the old woman's

moral disquisition gives way to the sexually charged values of the traditional narrative. Indeed, it could be argued that here we merely are returning to the core values of the *Wife of Bath's Prologue and Tale* in its entirety. The amount of space occupied therein by sexual “delit” and “worldly appetit” is enormous, and threatens to sweep away any opposing discourse. In the *Prologue*, the Wife’s blatant materiality is constantly present, and its description serves to mark her as a stereotypically weak and wanton woman; indeed, she could well be described as every misogynist’s worst nightmare come true. Over and over again, Chaucer has her condemn herself in particular, and women in general, out of her own mouth. Along with the “display of crude words”³⁶⁴ which was the subject of our previous chapter-section, and a spectacular demonstration of the “peyne” and “wo” (384) which a shrewish wife can make her husbands suffer, we hear Alisoun asserting that deceit and weeping come to women as naturally as spinning (400–402) and making sweeping generalizations about the sexual popularity of “fair” women and the sexual desperation of “foul” women (253–54, 265–68). This process continues in the *Tale*. Consider the choice the loathly damsel offers her reluctant husband: you can have me either fair and faithless or foul and faithful. The clear implication is that no woman can be at once fair and faithful—a cliché of medieval antifeminism. Jankyn’s book may now be ashes but its doctrines have not been destroyed; they are manifestly operative throughout Chaucer’s poem.

However, none of this is powerful enough to destroy the moment at which *doctrinitas** (to coin a term) transcends the containing and confining boundaries of the mock-*magisterium* of love. And what a moment it is. Theophrastus, that denizen of Jankyn’s book, had declared that a wise man should not take a wife, for this will hinder his study of philosophy.³⁶⁵ In the *Wife of Bath's Tale* it is the wife who acts as the philosopher, and her subsequent diminution in pedagogic status does not, I believe, retrospectively render worthless that action. It stands, albeit framed by suppressive attitudes and threatened by the gravitational pull of the original and underlying romance narrative, as a challenge to tradition, an affirmation that women can teach and indeed “preach”—in at least a loose sense of that term, the one implicated by Thomas of Chobham when he advised wives to serve as *praedicatrices* to their husbands. But maybe more than a loose sense is being implied? Given the orthodox suspicion of female teachers, that would be a daring supposition indeed—and one which finds little, if any, precedent in Chaucer’s own tales of Constance and Cecilia. If, however, we do suppose it, then Chaucer’s acquiescence in literary convention may be seen as tactical. He has enclosed his radical view within a structure which, as it were, defuses the explosive, while

allowing its threat to exist. And, should we manage to miss what Chaucer is up to, the Friar is there to point us in the right direction. Dame, he says nervously, leave such topics to official preaching and the schools of clergy.

He was not alone in expressing such worries. Raoul de Presles, who in 1375 contributed a commentated translation of Augustine's *De civitate Dei* to Charles V's translation program, explains his omission of theological questions from the second part of this work on the grounds that public disputation on such matters should be left to the schools, and certainly not conducted in his vernacular treatise: "Il ne loist a aucun a desputer publiquement de la foy crestienne, se ce n'est escoles pour avoir la verite des matieres."³⁶⁶ If a French scholar could express such concerns even in the context of the exceptional patronage of vernacular *publicatio* emanating from the court of Charles V, how much more pressing must they have been for Geoffrey Chaucer, due to the very different message coming from the court of Richard II. Raoul also set about making a French translation of the Bible, claiming at one point that no-one could accuse him of arrogance in so doing, since the king's command put paid to any such imputation: "vostre commandement m'en excusera en tout et par tout."³⁶⁷ The Wycliffite Bible enjoyed no such excuse, and had not been initiated by a royal command. Given the dangerous political conditions appertaining in Chaucer's England, the poet's refusal to leave difficult school-matter to the experts (in his presentation of the Pardoner as well as the Wife of Bath) creates at least the *effect* of action that is risky, radical, dissenting.

It is a very difficult judgment as to whether this effect is to be interpreted as Chaucerian dissidence or as modern "dissident reading" which has been made possible by language which generates "effects of meaning that cannot be circumscribed or checked" by the sociopolitical norms of the author's day, no matter what his own intentions, aspirations, or fears may have been.³⁶⁸ Here I draw on the doctrine of Michel de Certeau (Jesuit, 1960s visionary, Freudian, Lacanian, protostructuralist, pioneer of cultural studies, etc.), who has written well about the way in which, far from constituting "univocal" discourse, "fiction plays on the stratification of meaning. It narrates one thing in order to tell something else. . . ."Perhaps in the case of Chaucer's *Wife of Bath's Prologue and Tale* we are dealing with a text which *par excellence* "narrates one thing in order to tell something else," that "something else" being of immense cultural significance: namely, the problematizing of aspects of the late-medieval construction of gender insofar as they underpinned a restrictive set of social codes and conventions regarding the female teacher. On this reading the conventional closures of Chaucer's text cease to be of vital

importance. It is only to be expected, one could say, that the romance narrative should default back to its normative pattern of female subservience and male superiority, that the unruly woman should revert to obedient type, that the discourses of misogyny should reassert themselves. That is the price, so to speak, which has to be paid in order that space may be created for a section of text which (however temporarily) is disruptive of social and ideological norms. Or which can be read in those terms.

It could be objected, of course, that if we are indeed dealing with “effects of meaning that cannot be circumscribed or checked” then they may well prove too elusive for historical investigation. But I remain convinced that such a project can and should be pursued, as a means of speaking of the dead. And “to speak of the dead means to deny death and almost to defy it,” to use yet another phrase from de Certeau.³⁶⁹ Elsewhere he remarks that “writing speaks of the past only in order to inter it,” but this is a way of asserting that “language exorcises” and “arranges” death in a narrative “that pedagogically replaces it with something” that the reader (i.e., the maker, the constructor, of history) “must believe and do.”³⁷⁰ Such a sentiment is, I believe, some distance away from Jules Michelet’s claim that history-writing is work undertaken by the living to “quiet the dead,” which happens as the interpretive process brings together “all sorts of separated things and people into the semblance of a unity.”³⁷¹ I find that thought quite disturbing, and to it would oppose the words of the greatest American theologian of the twentieth century, Reinhold Niebuhr: “History is . . . comprised of causalities and sequences, coherences and structures which are not easily comprehended as meaningful. They are too varied and unique to fit into any simple pattern of meaning.” Besides, man, as the interpreter of history, “insinuates the partial, parochial, and unique aspects of his life into even the most ultimate insights of his mind.”³⁷²

Building on de Certeau, we may not merely recognize but indeed celebrate the power of “unassimilable fragments of alterity to unsettle and/or to alter a contemporary interpretive apparatus.” An array of “plural readings” is to be performed on history—history being understood “in terms of a multitude of combined and distinct, evolving and dissolving, composed and decomposed systems,” and the historian being aware that he himself is an agent in that process.³⁷³ What, then, of literary fiction, with which history has long had a family quarrel (not least because of fiction’s irritating habit of reminding history of its own contingencies)? Literature’s semantic instabilities and “overdetermination” (in the Althusserian sense)³⁷⁴ may be seen at once as part of its very definition and as the means whereby it can travel from past to present, being made, destroyed and

re-made in different shapes and forms. What W. H. Auden said so movingly about W. B. Yeats may also be said of Geoffrey Chaucer:

Now he is scattered among a hundred cities
And wholly given over to unfamiliar affections,
To find his happiness in another kind of wood
And to be punished under a foreign code of conscience.
The words of a dead man
Are modified in the guts of the living.³⁷⁵

Furthermore, the culture in which the literature originally was produced should itself not be regarded as a totalistic and enclosed structure—recent anthropological research has done much to warn us against such an assumption. Unfortunately, the late-medieval period has had sweeping and simplistic grand narratives forced upon it, with its alleged homogeneity being used as a point of contrast with later, supposedly more complicated, cultures (in this regard Foucault has a lot to answer for). The amount of diversity which existed within a culture such as Chaucer's should be given its due. And to reduce that to the differences between orthodox and heterodoxy, considered in sharply binary terms, would be simplistic indeed. We have often, and rightly, been warned against regarding Lollardy as a monolithic and unchanging ideology. On the contrary, degrees of that particular heresy could exist (in the sense that certain individuals might accept some of its tenets but not others, and some of those tenets themselves were subject to fluctuation and adaptation). And it could, so to speak, move in and out of uncontentious doctrine with remarkable ease. It is less fashionable, however, to make the parallel claim for orthodoxy. But I believe it can, and should, be made—and this book has often sought to make it. Far from being fixed in every significant detail, medieval cultural orthodoxy could take many forms and be pursued in different ways and to different extents. Within its broad, and shifting, parameters, criticism and contestation were often possible, and the *makyng* of troubling illustrations of ecclesiastical corruption and female *maistrie* are not necessarily to be read as intimations of some "Premature Reformation." In any case, masters of the actual Reformation had little truck with some of Lollardy's most socially subversive ideas, such as Walter Brut's (albeit limited) advocacy of female ministry—that being the only part of the Welshman's doctrine which John Foxe did not think fit to translate in his *Book of Martyrs*.³⁷⁶

Dead men tell many tales. And their words are routinely modified in the guts of the living. That is an inevitable process (to be stopped only by the erasure of those authors from communal memory). But it is, I believe, quite possible to hope that their words may not be punished under foreign codes of conscience, whether medieval or modern.

Abbreviations

All Chaucer references are to *The Riverside Chaucer*, general ed. Larry D. Benson (Oxford, 1988). My translations of biblical quotations by medieval authors generally follow Challoner's revision of the Douay Bible, as being close to the Latin Vulgate, but where a quotation differs markedly from the accepted Vulgate text, or where I am using a modern translation of the medieval text in question, I have followed the variant.

Davis, Sarah. *Singing Signs: Making Christian Tradition in Late Medieval England* (Notre Dame, Ind., 2004)

ARTHUR L'histoire doctrinale et littéraire du moyen âge

Alibi *Opera omnia*, ed. A. Borgnet (Paris, 1890–99)

Alexander Hisul' Hales, *Summa theologica* (Quaracchi, 1924–48); supplemented with *Summa theologica: pars quarta* (s.l., 1516)

Stultitia summa, *Signa theologiae*, Blackfriars ed. (London, 1964–81)

Aquinas, Thomas, *Opera omnia* (Parma, 1852–72)

Margaret Aston, *Lollards and Reformers: Images and Literacy in Late-Medieval Religion* (London, 1984).

Bahnhooper, J. P. *Quaestiones in quatuor libros sententiarum* (Cremona, 1618; rpt. Farnborough, 1969)

Bale and Bale, *Humanism, Medicine, and Controversy from Wyclif to Bale: Essays in Honour of Anne Hudson* (Turnhout, 2005)

Biblia glossata Glossa ordinaria et Postilla Nicolai Lyrani (Antwerp, 1617)

Bonaventura, Op. opera omnia (Quaracchi, 1882–1902)

COM Christianorum, continuatio medievalis

Thoburn of Simsbury, *ordinandide arte praedicandi*, ed. F. Morenzoni, CCCM 82 (1988)

Corpus iuris canonici, ed. Friedberg (Leipzig, 1879–81)

The Chaucer Review

Durandus of St. Remy, In sententias theologicas commentariorum libri IIII (Venice, 1571; rpt. Ridgewood, N.J., 1964)

EEES English Text Society, Extra Series

EEES English Text Society, Original Series

The English Works of W. M. W. Matthew, EETS OS 74 (London, 1880)

Fasciculi zizaniorum Magistri Johannis Wyclif, ed. W. W. Shirley, Rolls Series, 5 (London, 1858)

Colver-Gower's Simplex Works, ed. G. C. Macaulay (Oxford, 1899–1901)

Henry of Ghent, *Summa quaestionum ordinariam* (Paris, 1520, rpt. Louvain, 1953), and *Summa in tres partes praecipuas digesta* (Ferrara, 1646)

Anderson-Hudson-Holmes-Thiel Books (London, 1985)

Anders Hultgren, *The Reformation: Wycliffite Texts and Lollard History* (Oxford, 1988)

Journal of English and Germanic Philology

Opera of Bassolet, Karthensium libros aurea, 2 vols. (Paris, 1516–17).

Knight-Knight Chronicon drawn by J. R. Lumby, Rolls Series, 92 (London, 1895; rpt. 1965)

Leah Green, "The Magisterial Stère du prédicateur au XIIIe siècle," AHDMLA 21 (1946): 105-47

Pontobdellids, Sententiae in IV libris distinctae, Spici legum Bonaventurianum iv-v (Grottaferrata, 1971-81)

Monks, Hilda and Martin, 877 "Ordination of Women and the Theologians in the Middle Ages," *Escritos del Vedat* 16 (1986): 115–77, and 18 (1988): 87–143. Rpt. as a single unit in Bernard Cooke and Gary Macy (eds.), *The Ordination of Women in the Middle Ages* (Lanham, Md., 2002–4), i.31–160, to which reference is made.

Medium Aevum

Middle English Dictionary, ed. Hans Kurath, Sherman M. Kuhn, et al., in *Middle English Compendium* (Ann Arbor, Mich., 1998–), online edition, <http://ets.umdl.umich.edu/m/med/>
Modern Philology
Mediaeval Studies
Notus Notum Doctrinale antiquitatum fidei catholicae ecclesiae (Venice, 1757–59; rpt. Farnborough, Hants., 1967)
Notes of the History of the Diocese of Norwich, 1428–31, ed. Norman P. Tanner, *Camden Fourth Series*, 20 (London, 1977)
Oxford Latin Dictionary, ed. P. G. W. Glare, rpt. with corrections (Oxford, 1996)
Peter of la Palud, In *quatuor libros sententiarum* (Paris, 1514); also *Opus in quartum sententiarum* (Salamanca, 1552)
**Petrus de quatuor libris sententiarum (Toulouse, 1649–52; rpt. Ridgewood, N.J., 1964)
Petrologia graeca
Petrologia latina
Publications of the Modern Language Association of America
Rational Exclusion of Women from the Priesthood, 2nd ed., tr. in Bernard Cooke and Gary Macy (eds.), *The Ordination of Women in the Middle Ages* (Lanham, Md., 2002–4), ii, to which reference is made.
Richard of Middleton, *Super quatuor libros sententiarum* (Brescia, 1591; rpt. Frankfurt am Main, 1963)
Recherches de théologie ancienne et médiévale
Studies in the Age of Chaucer
Scoti Opera, Scotus, *Opera omnia* (Lyon, 1639, repr. Hildesheim, 1969)
Studies in Philology
Thomas of Strabon, *In IIII libros sententiarum* (Venice, 1564)
Walsingham, Thomas, *Historia Anglicana*, ed. H. T. Riley, *Rolls Series*, 28 (London, 1863–64; rpt. 1965)
Michael Walfis, *Wyclif: Political Ideas and Practice*, ed. Anne Hudson (Oxford, 2000)
Wyclif English Works, ed. by D. Matthew, *EETS OS* 74 (London, 1880)
Wyclif English Works, ed. by Thomas Arnold (Oxford, 1871)**

Notes

PREFACE

Note to epigraph: *The Collected Poems of Louis MacNeice*, ed. E. R. Dodds (London, 1966), p. 132.

1. *Independent*, 19 August 1998, p. 3.
2. *Guardian*, 30 January 1999; *Saturday Review*, p. 1.
3. Cf. *New York Times*, 4 November 2004, supplement on *The Elections*, pp. 1 and 4.
4. Cf. Bob Woodward, *Shadow: Five Presidents and the Legacy of Watergate* (New York, 1999), p. 501.
5. This stance is quite in line with the one adopted by David Aers and Lynn Staley in their important co-authored study, *The Powers of the Holy: Religion, Politics, and Gender in Late Medieval English Culture* (University Park, Pa., 1996).
6. Pace the lively speculation in *Who Murdered Chaucer? A Medieval Mystery*, by Terry Jones, with Robert Yeager, Terry Dolan, Alan J. Fletcher, and Juliette Dor (London, 2003).
7. "Chaucer the Heretic," *SAC* 25 (2003): 53–121 (p. 55).
8. "Chaucer the Heretic," p. 55 and n. 88.
9. Dr. Fletcher would agree with most if not all of that, for it is consonant with his interpretive default-position: "it seems to me impossible finally to decide whether Chaucer was even as moderately committed in reality to certain of the ideals of the Lollard radicals as the word "sympathy" might suggest" ("Chaucer the Heretic," p. 108). However, he goes on to propose that in certain *Canterbury Tales* "a broadly sketched ecclesiology is valorized in whose outline certain Wycliffite precedents would have been clearly recognizable" (p. 111). On this argument, Chaucer seems, at the very least, to have colluded with "certain Wycliffite precedents"; indeed, maybe he deliberately sought to promote them. It is hard not to find in this alleged act of valorization an indication of "sympathy" with "certain of the ideals of the Lollard radicals." (But, could Chaucer have "valorized" those "Wycliffite precedents" without being aware of their heretical affiliations? That seems unlikely: if Chaucer's readers would "clearly" have recognized distinctively "Wycliffite precedents," then surely Chaucer himself would also have done so?)
10. Rita Copeland, introduction, Copeland (ed.), *Criticism and Dissent in the Middle Ages* (Cambridge, 1996), pp. 1–23 (p. 3).
11. To pick up another phrase from Copeland, "Introduction," p. 3.
12. Cf. Copeland, "Introduction," p. 4.

INTRODUCTION

1. Susan Ratcliffe (ed.), *People on People: The Oxford Dictionary of Biographical Quotations* (Oxford, 2001), p. 83.
2. Quoted in *The Guardian*, 29 January 1998, p.*5.
3. *Wall Street Journal*, 18 August 1998, p.A2 ("Review and Outlook: Lying to Ourselves"). On the same page, Robert Dallek takes comfort from the thought that "the office itself is far more important than the man who holds it temporarily."
4. *The Guardian*, 12 September 1998, *Special Report: Clinton Crisis*, p. 6.
5. *De generatione animalium*, 737a.
6. Cf. *OLD*, s.v. *deuius*, senses 2 and 3 (i.534); the derivation is from *de* + *via*. In his great Latin dictionary, the Italian canonist Hugutio of Pisa (d. 1210) glosses *deuius* thus: "exorbitare, extra viam ire, unde *deuius*-a -um"; *Uguccione da Pisa, Derivationes*, ed. Enzo Cecchini et al. (Florence, 2004), ii.1256 (U 11 16). This is reiterated in Giovanni de'Balbi of Genoa's thirteenth-century Latin dictionary, the *Catholicon* (Mainz, 1460, rep. 1971), s.v. *deuius* (unfoliated).
7. Boethius, *The Theological Tractates and the Consolation of Philosophy*, ed. H. F. Stewart, E. K. Rand, and S. J. Tester (Cambridge, Mass., 1973), p. 260.

8. Cf. the fifteenth-century translation of Ralph Higden's *Polychronicon* i.31, which describes this period as "the state of deuiaction"; the phrase "Tyme of Deuyacion" appears in the *Assembly of the Gods*, l. 1683. I draw these references from the *MED*, s.v. *deviacion* and *deviaunt*.

9. Chaucer's *Boece*, p. 428.

10. The "vernycle" may be taken evidence of a visit to one of the main attractions of St. Peter's in Rome, a cloth believed to bear the image of Christ's face. See Chapter 2 below.

11. On which see A. J. Minnis, *Medieval Theory of Authorship: Scholastic Literary Attitudes in the Later Middle Ages*, 2nd ed. (Aldershot, 1988), p. 10. The subject of medieval textual authority (in its many shapes and forms) has enjoyed considerable scholarly attention in the past twenty-five years or thereabouts. The following publications are crucial: Rita Copeland, *Hermeneutics and Translation in the Middle Ages: Academic Traditions and Vernacular Texts* (Cambridge, 1991); John Dagenais, *The Ethics of Reading in Manuscript Culture: Glossing the "Libro de buen amor"* (Princeton, 1994); Elisabeth Andersen, Jens Haustein, et al. (eds.), *Autor und Autorschaft im Mittelalter: Kolloquium Meissen 1995* (Tübingen, 1998); Jocelyn Wogan-Browne, Nicholas Watson, et al. (eds.), *The Idea of the Vernacular: An Anthology of Middle English Literary Theory, 1280–1520* (Exeter, 1999); M. Zimmerman (ed.), *Auctor et auctoritas: Invention et conformisme dans l'écriture médiévale, actes du colloque de Saint-Quentin-en-Yvelines (14–16 juin 1999)* (Geneva, 2001); Larry Scanlon, *Narrative, Authority, and Power: The Medieval Exemplum and the Chaucerian Tradition* (Cambridge, 1994), pp. 37–54; and Kantik Ghosh, *The Wycliffite Heresy: Authority and the Interpretation of Texts* (Cambridge, 2002).

12. John Guillory, *Poetic Authority: Spenser, Milton and Literary History* (New York, 1983), p. vii.

13. This was the normal Latin term for a Pardoner—designating one who sought out alms from sundry folk to assist his particular "charity" (to adopt the modern usage). Cf. the anonymous *Memoriale presbiterorum*, iii.43: "Questores dicitur a querendo, eo quod mittuntur ad querendum elemosinas fidelium." Cambridge, Corpus Christi College, 148, fol. 77r. The *Memoriale* goes on to explain that the alms collected in this way are used in the service of hospitals and the sick people therein, and for the repair of churches, together with bridges and roads (to ensure easy access to hospitals and churches). This treatise dates from the mid-fourteenth century, and has a connection with Norwich Cathedral Priory.

14. On this concept see especially Fiona Somerset, *Clerical Discourse and Lay Audience in Late-Medieval England* (Cambridge, 1998), pp. 106–7, and Felicity Riddy, "Publication before Print: The Case of Julian of Norwich," in Julia Crick and Alexandra Walsham (eds.), *The Uses of Script and Print, 1300–1700* (Cambridge, 2003), pp. 29–49. Cf. R. E. Latham, *A Revised Medieval Latin Word-List from British and Irish Sources* (London, 1965), s.v. *publicatio*, p. 381, and the definitions and examples in the *MED*, s.v. *publishen* (v.) and *publicacioun* (n.). The period in the early Christian church when the Gospel was being proclaimed was called the *tempus publicationis*; cf. p. 317 below. On orthodox anger at the Lollard's "publication" of their *Twelve Conclusions* see n. 122 below. The term has particular resonance in respect of the ways in which holy women "made public" their revelations, given that they were barred from the performance of such "public" offices as teaching in a school or preaching from a pulpit. For Adam Easton's defense of Bridget of Sweden's "publication" of the rule which Christ Himself dictated to her (*pace* St. Paul's prohibition of women speaking in church) see Chapter 3 below.

15. Hugutio of Pisa defines *publicus* as appertaining to everyone in general (*ad omnes generaliter*), adding that from this term comes pulpit, lectern, reading place, etc., because "there people read publicly so that they can be seen by the people." *Derivationes*, ed. Cecchini et al., ii.968 (P 120).

16. The *MED*, s.v. *publicacioun* (n.), cites the idiom "publicacioun [Lat. *publicatio*] of vice" from John Trevisa's *Polychronicon* translation. Cf. Thomas of Chobham's attack on those who have proclaimed abroad or "published" (*publicauerunt*) their "sin as Sodom," rather than decorously hiding it, discussed on pp. 17–18 below. Such revelation is, of course, elsewhere seen in a positive light, as highly conducive to the public good.

17. With this cf. the *Clerk's Tale*, IV(E) 743–49. Walter orders "the court of Rome" to forge bulls which require him to leave his first wife, Grisilda, and marry another; "thus seyde the bulle, / The which they han *publiced* atte fulle."

18. Isidore of Seville, *Etymologiae*, I.xl.1.

19. To borrow a term from Chaucer's statement of Homer's pro-Greek bias; *House of Fame*,

20. *Genealogia deorum gentilium*, xiv.13, tr. in A. J. Minnis and A. B. Scott with D. Wallace, *Medieval Literary Theory and Criticism*, c. 1100–c. 1375: *The Commentary Tradition*, rev. ed. (Oxford, 1991), pp. 434–36.

21. *Le Familiari*, xiv.4; tr. in Minnis, Scott, and Wallace, *Medieval Literary Theory and Criticism*, p. 417.

22. As employed throughout his book *The Ethical Poetic of the Later Middle Ages* (Toronto, 1982).

23. For discussion and references see Minnis, *Medieval Theory of Authorship*, pp. 23–27, and Minnis, Scott, and Wallace, *Medieval Literary Theory and Criticism*, pp. 2, 11, 13–14, 15, 26, etc.

24. On such interpretive maneuvers see especially Ralph J. Hexter, *Ovid and Medieval Schooling: Studies in Medieval School Commentaries on Ovid's "Ars amatoria," "Epistulae ex Ponto," and "Epistulae heroidum"* (Munich, 1986).

25. *Il Convivio*, i.2, ed. Bruna Cordati (Turin, 1968), p. 12.

26. Tr. Minnis, Scott, and Wallace, *Medieval Literary Theory and Criticism*, pp. 502–3.

27. *Le Débat sur le Roman de la Rose*, ed. Eric Hicks, Bibliothèque du XVe siècle, 43 (Paris, 1977), p. 94; cf. “La Querelle de la Rose”: *Letters and Documents*, tr. Joseph L. Baird and John R. Kane, North Carolina Studies in the Romance Languages and Literatures, 199 (Chapel Hill, N.C., 1978), pp. 97–98.

28. That point of view has been echoed by such recent readers of the *Rose* as D. W. Robertson, *A Preface to Chaucer: Studies in Medieval Perspectives* (Princeton, 1962), p. 199; and John Fleming, *The Roman de la Rose: A Study in Allegory and Iconography* (Princeton, 1969), pp. 107, 132–35.

29. For discussion and references see Minnis, *Medieval Theory of Authorship*, pp. 103–8.

30. *Prooemium commentarii*, qu. 4; *Bonaventurae opera*, vi.8; tr. Minnis, Scott, and Wallace, *Medieval Literary Theory and Criticism*, pp. 232–33; cf. the discussion on pp. 207–9.

31. In such a context “scandal” denotes something which occasions a general feeling of outrage or indignation, causes a public affront. The modern “tabloid” sense of sexual revelation is not necessarily relevant here, given that this is only one of several possible sources of scandal. St. Thomas Aquinas defines the term in terms of a “stumbling” whereby something done or said may occasion someone’s spiritual downfall: *Summa theologiae*, 2a 2ae, qu. 43, art. 1 (xxxv.110–11). On other uses of the term see Katherine Gill, “*Scandalia*: Controversies Concerning *clausura* and Women’s Religious Communities in Late Medieval Italy,” in S. L. Waugh and Peter D. Diehl (eds.), *Christendom and Its Discontents: Exclusion, Persecution, and Rebellion* (Cambridge, 1996), pp. 177–203.

32. Here and throughout this book I use the term *auctoritas* in the technical sense of a passage excerpted from an authoritative text, the work of an *auctor*.

33. *Le Débat*, ed. Hicks, p. 97; cf. Baird and Kane, *Letters and Documents*, pp. 100–101.

34. Presumably, when it took proper hold the strength of his desire could well threaten his professional activities, in Col’s view. The suggestion that the august Chancellor might well succumb to sexual desire was a particularly outrageous one, given the man’s reputation for rigid self-control, on which see the articles by Brian P. McGuire, “Sexual Control and Spiritual Growth in the Late Middle Ages: The Case of Jean Gerson,” in Nancy van Deusen (ed.), *Tradition and Ecstasy: The Agony of the Fourteenth Century* (Ottawa, 1997), pp. 123–52; and “Jean Gerson and the End of Spiritual Friendship: Dilemmas of Conscience,” in Julian Haseldine (ed.), *Friendship in Medieval Europe* (Stroud, 1999), pp. 229–50.

35. *The King’s Two Bodies: A Study in Medieval Political Theology* (Princeton, 1957). The Kantorowicz thesis has inevitably been revised, updated, and indeed challenged by subsequent scholarship; for a particularly important recent intervention (which concentrates on the development of rituals emphasizing the king’s quasi-divine sovereignty) see Sergio Bertelli, *The King’s Body: Sacred Rituals of Power in Medieval and Early Modern Europe*, tr. R. Burr Litchfield (University Park, Pa., 2001).

36. Quoted by Kantorowicz, *King’s Two Bodies*, p. 47.

37. Kantorowicz, *King’s Two Bodies*, p. 48.

38. Kantorowicz, *King’s Two Bodies*, p. 17.

39. Kantorowicz, *King’s Two Bodies*, p. 93.

40. Kantorowicz, *King’s Two Bodies*, pp. 96–97.

41. *John of Salisbury: Policraticus*, ed. and tr. C. J. Nederman (Cambridge, 1990), pp. 28,

- 30.
42. *Policraticus*, tr. Nederman, p. 31.
43. *Summa theologiae*, 1a 2ae, qu. 90, art. 3, ad 2um (xxviii.12–15).
44. Kantorowicz, *King's Two Bodies*, p. 172.
45. However, the “two bodies” concept is certainly useful as a means of focusing attention on various disjunctions between authority and fallibility which range more widely than those addressed in Kantorowicz’s study. This is the position taken in my 1997 article “The Author’s Two Bodies? Authority and Fallibility in Late-Medieval Textual Theory,” in P. Robinson and R. Zim (eds.), *Of The Making of Books: Medieval Manuscripts, Their Scribes and Readers. Essays presented to M. B. Parkes* (Aldershot, 1997), pp. 259–79. Excellent use of the (adapted and amplified) concept has recently been made by Claire Waters in her *Angels and Earthly Creatures: Preaching, Performance, and Gender in the Later Middle Ages* (Philadelphia, 2003).
46. Walter Ullmann, *A Short History of the Papacy in the Middle Ages* (London, 1972), pp. 20–21. I have drawn on Ullmann’s account of this disjunction because of the obvious ways in which it parallels Kantorowicz’s description of the king’s two bodies. The limits of its categorization are well brought out by Agostino Paravicini Bagliani’s innovative study, which takes much heed of the pope’s material and mortal body, and how his physical health was related to his fitness for office (with special reference to the case of Boniface VIII); *The Pope’s Body*, tr. David S. Peterson (Chicago, 2000).
47. Ullmann, *History of Papacy*, p. 268.
48. Ullmann, *History of Papacy*, p. 269. Writing around 1280, Peter John Olivi stated that an error by a pope “could be merely personal or it could be magisterial, i.e., it could be merely an individual opinion or it could be proposed as a public teaching which would affect the faith of others.” However, Olivi felt that distinguishing between “the pope’s private and public capacities” did not address the enormity of the problem, because the horrifying prospect remained of a person making pronouncements from the papal throne who was a pope “only in name and appearance.” Cf. Brian Tierney, *Origins of Papal Infallibility, 1150–1350: A Study on the Concepts of Infallibility, Sovereignty and Tradition in the Middle Ages* (Leiden, 1972), pp. 120–21. Tierney regards Olivi’s contribution as crucial in the development of the doctrine of papal infallibility.
49. Diana Wood, *Clement VI: The Pontificate and Ideas of an Avignon Pope* (Cambridge, 1989), pp. 23, 25.
50. Wood, *Clement VI*, pp. 27, 28.
51. John J. Ryan, *The Nature, Structure, and Function of the Church in William of Ockham*, American Academy of Religion: Studies in Religion, 16 (Missoula, Mont., 1979), p. 9.
52. Ryan, *Church in Ockham*, p. 10. On Ockham’s views on papal infallibility (or, more accurately, fallibility) see especially John Kilcullen, “Ockham on Infallibility,” *Journal of Religious History*, 16 (1991), 387–409. This article offers an important critique of the views of Tierney, *Origins of Papal Infallibility*, pp. 205–37.
53. Ryan, *The Church in Ockham*, p. 20.
54. *Summa theologiae*, 3a, qu. 64, art. 5: *utrum per malos ministros sacramenta conferri possint* (lvi.114–19).
55. *In Joann.* V, on John 1:33 (PL 35, col. 1419).
56. This type of argument, however, did not apply to women’s bodies, women being denied such instrumentality in the ministration of the sacraments: see Chapter 3 below.
57. This forms part of Henry’s question *Utrum homo peccator possit esse doctor huius scientiae*, being art. 11, qu. 5, of the prologue to the *Summa quaestionum ordinariam*. First written at Paris c. 1275–76, the prologue was revised toward the end of Henry’s career in 1289. Here and below I use two early printed editions (Paris, 1520, and Ferrara, 1646); cf. my list of abbreviations. For art. 11, qu. 5 see Paris ed., fols. 79v–81r; Ferrara ed., pp. 199–201.
58. Gerard was the Carmelites’ first doctor of theology, with a degree from the University of Paris (1295). He served as Prior General of his order from 1297 until his death in 1317.
59. Here we may recall Hugutio of Pisa’s association of *publicus* and *pulpitum*; cf. n. 15 above.
60. See pp. 174–75 below. This passage was quoted by a correspondent to the British *Guardian* newspaper on 15 January 2000 (p. 25), who was reacting to Lavinia Byrne’s resignation from her religious order as a protest against what she perceived as antifeminism in the Catholic church. “The Catholic sacraments cannot be administered promiscuously and no one may demand them as a right. You can no more ordain a woman than marry a pair of

chimpanzees.”

61. *Holy Feast and Holy Fast: The Religious Significance of Food to Medieval Women* (Berkeley, 1987). To take a particularly vivid example, a Cistercian monk experienced a vision in which a golden chalice issues from the mouth of Mary of Oignies and gives drink to two of his friends. Thus in death Mary performs “a quasi-sacerdotal feeding role” which was denied to her in life, as Bynum notes (pp. 123–24).

62. See below, pp. 183–87, 192–97, 198, etc.

63. See below, p. 193.

64. Chobham, *Summa praedicandi*, p. 58.

65. Georges Duby, “Private Power, Public Power,” in *A History of Private Life*, vol. 2: *Revelations of the Medieval World*, ed. Georges Duby (Cambridge, Mass., 1988), p. 7. Recently Shannon McSheffrey has challenged what she sees as Duby’s misleadingly reductive view of “the family” as “the heart of private life”; cf. especially her concluding discussion of “Sex, Marriage, and Medieval Concepts of the Public,” in *Marriage, Sex, and Civic Culture in Late Medieval London* (Philadelphia, 2006), pp. 190–94.

66. Cf. Matthew 23:3; encapsulated by Jerome, *Epistola lii*, in *PL* 22, col. 533.

67. However, Agnes perseveres and swallows the Eucharist he has confected “with such sweetness” as she habitually experiences when taking communion—a clear indication that the sacrament has not been harmed by the celebrant’s sexual deviancy. “The priest, however, when it was his turn to receive the Body [of Christ], looked around at the altar as if he had lost something.” As indeed he has. Agnes then records, with evident satisfaction, that some years later the Lord struck that priest with epilepsy, and he was reduced to begging. Cf. Ulrike Wiethaus, *Agnes Blannbekin, Viennese Beguine: “Life and Revelations,” Translated from the Latin with Introduction, Notes and Interpretive Essay* (Cambridge, 2002), p. 39.

68. Chobham, *Summa praedicandi*, p. 25.

69. The *Glossa ordinaria* throws no light on the matter, being concerned to emphasize the evils of idol worship, while Nicholas of Lyre’s discussion correctly explains the meaning of the term *strumenta* as *sellam* (a seat or chair): *Biblia glossata*, i.351–52. The *OLD* glosses *stramen* and *stramentum* as straw used for animal litter or bedding, with both words carrying the related meaning of “a coverlet, rug”; *stramentum* could denote the coverings spread on a beast of burden to prevent the load chafing its hide. In the major medieval Latin dictionaries, by Hugutio of Pisa and Giovanni de’Balbi, the meaning “straw” features. “Et hoc *stramen* -nis, quod ante animalia sternitur vel super lectulum, quod et hoc *stramentum* dicitur, et dicitur a stramine”; *Derivationes*, ed. Cecchini et al., ii.1173 (S 311 2), which is followed by de’Balbi, *Catholicon*, s.v. *stramen*. Could Thomas have been thinking of soiled, dung-covered animal litter? Perhaps, but there might be another explanation. Ralph Hanna has suggested to me that Thomas may have misread *strumenta* (probably abbreviated in the Biblical text he was using) as a form related to *stercus* or *sterquilinum*, “dung” (cf. Psalm 82:11, “as dung for the earth,” *sterquilinum terrae*). Whatever lies behind this passage in Thomas’s *Summa praedicandi*, fortunately his grotesque image of Rachel sitting on camel dung, menstruating, did not catch on.

70. As Nicholas of Lyre’s gloss explains.

71. However, such arguments were not the exclusive property of those who sought to cover the blushes (or bottoms) of the clergy. They could be used in support of the idea that “secret sins” should not be made public if this would plunge the perpetrator even deeper into sin. (There is nothing here of the modern notion of the “right to privacy.”) See, for example, Aquinas’s defense of the proposition that a priest should not expose publicly a person’s sin by refusing him communion; *Summa theologiae*, 3a, qu. 80, art. 6 (lix. 53, 55)

72. As when Mechthild of Magdeburg (c. 1208–c. 1282/94) had a vision of how, in purgatory, “the souls of wretched priests who in this world floated in greedy desires and burned in damned lust” become like fish in human form. Devils claw them out of the water with their “fiery claws,” cruelly tear their skins off and throw them into “a boiling pot.” When they are cooked, the devils eat them—and then excrete them back into the water, the whole revolting process beginning again. *Das fliessende Licht der Gottheit*, v. 14, ed. Margot Schmidt, *Mystik in Geschichte und Gegenwart*: Abt. 1, *Christliche Mystik*, Bd. 11 (Stuttgart, 1995), p. 176; tr. Frank Tobin, *The Flowing Light of the Godhead* (New York, 1998), pp. 191–92.

73. Originally Donatism (named after Donatus, one of its most ardent supporters) was a fourth-century schismatic movement precipitated by the refusal of certain Christians to accept consecrations by Felix, bishop of Aptunga, most notably that of Bishop Caecelian. Felix was

regarded as a *traditor*, one who had turned over sacred books and relics to the civil authorities during the Emperor Diocletian's persecution. Underlying their outrage was the belief that the validity of any sacrament depended upon the personal worthiness of the priest administering it, hence anyone who communicated with *traditores* was infected.

74. This common construction of Donatist thought—which derives from the attacks by Optatus (c. 320–c. 387, Catholic Bishop of Milevis) and St. Augustine—is, according to Maureen A. Tilley, a travesty of what Donatists actually taught and practiced; for her revisionist thesis see *The Bible in Christian North Africa: The Donatist World* (Minneapolis, 1997).

75. *Of Prelates*, in Wyclif, *English Works*, ed. Matthew, p. 102. However, this follows a (perfectly orthodox) statement to the effect that “[p]e sacrament may not be paired [impaired] for synne of þe prest.” It should be noted that suspicion concerning the heretic-priest's sacraments was of long standing, and was brought to the attention of generation after generation of schoolmen by a highly controversial statement in Peter Lombard's *Sentences*; see *Lib. sent.* IV, dist. xiii, cap. 1, 4–9 (ii.312–14). Albert the Great believed the Lombard had spoken “falsely” by questioning the validity of such sacraments; see p. 60 below. In the fraught religious environment of late-medieval England, this issue took on fresh importance and held new dangers.

76. *English Wycliffite Sermons*, ed. Pamela Gradon and Anne Hudson (Oxford, 1983–96), iv.91–2, 104.

77. In attacking this claim (in 1395), Roger Dymmok affirms that the power conferred by ordination (*potestas ordinis*) can indeed coexist with mortal sin in the same person. *Liber contra XII errores et hereses Lollardorum*, ed. H. S. Cronin (London, 1922), pp. 53, 66.

78. “Quod sacerdos existens in mortali peccato non poterit vi verborum sacramentalium corpus Christi conficere, seu aliud quodcumque sacramentum ecclesie perficere nec ecclesie membris ministrare.” *Registrum Johannis Trefnant*, ed. William W. Capes, Canterbury and York Society, 20 (London, 1916), pp. 236, 242, 246.

79. *Norwich Heresy Trials*, ed. Tanner, p. 141.

80. G. G. Willis, *Saint Augustine and the Donatist Controversy* (London, 1950), pp. 151–52.

81. “Et bonos et malos posse habere, posse dare, posse accipere.” Good and bad alike can have, can give, can receive the sacrament of baptism, Augustine asserts; it makes no difference to the sacrament “how much worse he may be that confers it, just as it makes no difference how much better he may be.” *De baptismo contra Donatistas*, VI.ii.4; *PL* 43, col. 199. The Donatist Petilian had appropriated the words of Christ at Matthew 12:35; “A good man out of a good treasure bringeth forth good things: and an evil man out of an evil treasure bringeth forth evil things.” Augustine's stringent response was that “No man, even though he be not guilty through his own sins, can make his neighbour free from sin, because he is not God.” *Contra litteras Petiliani Donatistae*, II.vi.12–13; *PL* 43, col. 261.

82. Cf. Willis, *Augustine and the Donatist Controversy*, p. 161; also pp. 166–68.

83. This may be illustrated from the *Norwich Heresy Trials* (as edited by Norman P. Tanner), where we find consistent and comprehensive devaluation of the powers of the ordained clergy: priests can neither absolve from sin (God alone can do that) nor make the body of Christ in the Eucharist, and they are denied any special function in respect to the sacraments of baptism, confirmation, and marriage. In short, “no prest in erthe hath poer to make the sacramentes, but God oonly hath that poar and noon other prest” (trial of Richard Knobbyng de Beccles, in *Norwich Heresy Trials*, ed. Tanner, p. 115).

84. Gordon Leff, *Heresy in the Later Middle Ages* (Manchester, 1967), ii.520.

85. *Norwich Heresy Trials*, ed. Tanner, p. 57.

86. “Quod si episcopus vel sacerdos existat in peccato mortale: non ordinat, conficit, nec baptizat.” *Fasciculi zizaniorum*, p. 278; cf. p. 320. This viewpoint was also condemned at the Council of Constance (1414–18). King Henry V sent the Carmelite theologian Thomas Netter there in 1415. One of Wyclif's most intelligent critics (whose vast *Doctrinale antiquitatum fidei catholice ecclesie* we shall be citing in subsequent chapters), Netter had no hesitation in identifying Wyclif as a member of the Donatist sect (ii.54, 60, 90, etc.), and frequently using Augustine's anti-Donatist writings against him. The *Tractatus de ministro sacramentorum* (in *Doctrinale*, ii.43–112) reviews a wide range of suspect passages in Wyclif's writings, affirming such orthodox doctrines as “infidelis sacerdos non derogat sacramentum,” “Deus conficit cum malo ministro,” “Christus sine sanctitate conscientie sacerdotum conficit sacramentum,” “peccator publicus non minus conficit, quam occultus,” and “praelati possunt conficere,

quamvis praesciti.” Furthermore, Netter was convinced that Wyclif’s gestures toward a true church consisting only of those predestined to eternal glory was similar to (albeit worse than) the original Donatists’ belief that their sect comprised an exclusive *ecclesia iustorum*, one consequence of which was the rejection of sacraments consecrated by outsiders. Cf. *Doctrinale*, i.329–34, ii.105, etc.

87. Ian Christopher Levy, *John Wyclif: Scriptural Logic, Real Presence, and the Parameters of Orthodoxy* (Milwaukee, 2003), p. 306.

88. *Fasciculi zizaniorum*, p. 320. This forms part of their *confessio* in response to the 1382 Blackfriars propositions.

89. *De apostasia*, ed. M. H. Dziewicki (London, 1889), pp. 219–20; cf. the relevant *Confessio* passage in *Fasciculi zizaniorum*, p. 116, and Levy’s comment in his *Scriptural Logic*, p. 306. Earlier Levy says that Wyclif’s *Confessio* was “later incorporated into *De apostasia*” (p. 237), but Anne Hudson (here I quote a personal communication) suspects that *De apostasia* was written first. At any rate, the doctrine in question was attacked by the Augustinian friar Thomas Winterton in his *Absolutio* (a direct response to Wyclif’s *Confessio*); *Fasciculi zizaniorum*, pp. 204–6. As is noted by Ian Levy (who believes that Wyclif here “enters into the territory of Donatism”), Winterton “appeals to the distinction made in the *Decretum* that a good life is necessary for the celebrant only as it pertains to the effect upon himself, and not for his ability to consecrate.” “Was John Wyclif’s Theology of the Eucharist Donatistic?” *Scottish Journal of Theology*, 53 (2000), 137–53 (p. 151).

90. “Videtur autem mihi quod prescitus etiam in mortali peccato actuali ministrat fidelibus, licet sibi dampnabiliter, tamen subiectis utiliter sacramenta.” *De ecclesia*, ed. J. Loserth (London, 1886), p. 448. Furthermore, as Levy points out (*Scriptural Logic*, p. 307), in an Advent sermon of 1381 Wyclif refers to Augustine’s debate with the Donatists when affirming that, in effecting all His sacraments, God is not obstructed by any man’s lack of dignity; *Sermones*, I.iv, in *Iohannis Wyclif sermones*, ed. J. Loserth (London, 1887–90), i.25.

91. *Sermones*, I.xl; ed. Loserth, i.268. See further Netter’s refutation in *Doctrinale*, ii.99–104. In *De veritate sacrae scripturae* Wyclif remarks that a priest who is a notorious fornicator should not be reputed a legitimate priest; *De veritate sacrae scripturae*, ed. R. Buddensieg (London, 1905–7), iii.5–6. Such a comment hardly inspires confidence in the sacraments administered by the immoral priest. Whether we are or are not dealing with actual Donatism here, that type of statement was asking for trouble, and Wyclif had plenty of enemies who were disinclined to give him the benefit of the doubt.

92. *De antichristo*, I.xlviii, in *Opus evangelicum*, ed. J. Loserth and F. D. Matthew (London, 1895–96), ii.175–76.

93. *De Eucharistia tractatus maior*, ed. J. Loserth (London, 1892), pp. 112–13. Cf. the analysis by Ian Levy in his article “Was John Wyclif’s Theology of the Eucharist Donatistic?” pp. 146–47. Further discussion of this *De Eucharistia* passage is included in Chapter 3 below.

94. Levy, “Was John Wyclif’s Theology of the Eucharist Donatistic?” pp. 143, 139.

95. Levy, “Was John Wyclif’s Theology of the Eucharist Donatistic?” p. 153.

96. Levy, *Scriptural Logic*, p. 307.

97. *Opera minora*, ed. J. Loserth (London, 1913), pp. 177–78.

98. Malcolm Lambert’s comment is highly apposite: “Gradually a more academic Lollardy faded, and it was no longer reinforced by graduate recruits, and the simpler Donatism and anticlericalism of the less-educated preachers took its place”; *Medieval Heresy: Popular Movements from the Gregorian Reform to the Reformation*, 2nd ed. (Oxford, 1992), p. 259. England came rather late to this particular game, since, as Lambert has noted elsewhere, “When heresies at a popular level are . . . recorded in Western Europe in the twelfth century the most common single tenet amongst them is that the sacraments of evil-living priests are invalid”; *The Cathars* (Oxford, 1998), p. 14. See further pp. 4, 284. On Donatism in respect of Waldensianism see Gabriel Audisio, *The Waldensian Dissent, Persecution and Survival*, c. 1170–c. 1570, tr. C. Davison (Cambridge, 1999), pp. 18, 19, 28, 51–52, 54–55, 93, 96, 97, 139, 180, and Euan Cameron, *Waldenses: Rejections of Holy Church in Medieval Europe* (Oxford, 2000), pp. 25–28, 37, 44–45, 47–48, 50, 56, 59, 70, 76, 85–86, 90–91, 93, 95, 100, 102–3, 124, 143, 153, 159–60, 171, 187, 189–90, 235, 237, 298–99, 300. In their amplification and augmentation of the abovementioned “provocative speculation,” Wyclif’s descendants were following a long-established European trend.

99. While not necessarily involving or requiring Donatism, may such *dominium* theory be regarded as supportive of its development? On the face of it, the belief that anyone living in

mortal sin cannot have true dominion seems to be consonant with the Donatist notion that priests living in mortal sin cannot truly consecrate the sacraments. Thomas Netter certainly found interconnections between these discourses of power; cf. *Doctrinale*, ii.54–58 (*quod potest consecrationis sacramentalis non suspenditur in praelato, propter omne mortale peccatum*). However, there is a crucial difference, inasmuch as dominion may be deemed a personal matter, while valid administration of the sacraments is more functionary, in the sense that Christ is the real minister while the priest (who is after all just a channel of grace) acts as His instrument. God is free to bestow grace on any individual He pleases despite that person's faults, and, in the case of the priesthood, that grace is dispensed through ordination. As our discussion in Chapter 3 will indicate, Wyclif took a troubling interest in the possibility of "ordination" by God Himself, thereby undermining the role of the Church hierarchy and bringing the divine into direct relationship with the grace-filled human. The positing of such a direct relationship was also of major import for Wycliffite *dominium* theory. Previous attempts to theorize the issue also had claimed that dominion was dependent upon grace, but this was supposed to be mediated within the Church through an orderly hierarchical process. Wycliffite thought tended to cut out the middlemen. (I am grateful to Ian Levy for discussion of these matters.)

100. The bibliography on this subject is substantial. The recent study by Stephen E. Lahey, *Philosophy and Politics in the Thought of John Wyclif* (Cambridge, 2003), includes a useful review of previous scholarship, on pp. 9–23. Lahey's own objective is to demonstrate that Wyclif's *dominium* theory relies upon his realist metaphysics, and that his "programme of reform" is a consequence of his view of the relationship between divine and created dominion. An extensive consideration of Wyclif's views in relation to Ockham's is included in Jesse M. Gellrich's study, *Discourse and Dominion in the Fourteenth Century: Oral Contexts of Writing in Philosophy, Politics, and Poetry* (Princeton, 1995).

101. Cf. *Fasciculi zizaniorum*, p. 280. For skepticism concerning the practical consequences of this particular doctrine see pp. 219–20 below.

102. *Fasciculi zizaniorum*, p. 278. Cf. the *confessio* of Nicholas Hereford and Philip Repingdon, p. 321.

103. *The Order of Priesthood*, 29, in Wyclif, *English Works*, ed. Matthew, p. 179.

104. The second of these quotations is from the hyperbolic commendation of preaching in the Wycliffite *De officio pastorali*, 23; the first, from a complaint in the treatise *Of Confession* to the effect that the office of preaching, which Christ performed Himself and commanded apostles and priests to continue, is nowadays despised and abused. Wyclif, *English Works*, ed. Matthew, pp. 441–42, 344–45.

105. "The sin that hinders this engendering [i.e., this spiritual productivity = preaching] cries to God to be avenged." *De officio pastorali*, 23, in Wyclif, *English Works*, ed. Matthew, p. 442.

106. *De veritate*, ed. Buddensieg, iii.67–68. Wyclif goes on to argue that all canonical elections should depend on (as their very root) the worthiness of the elected candidate, and human officials should ensure that their choice follows God's (pp. 72–74).

107. *Fasciculi zizaniorum*, p. 390.

108. "Lollard Women Priests?" in Aston, *Lollards and Reformers*, pp. 49–70 (p. 67).

109. *Manuel de l'inquisiteur*, ed. G. Mollat (Paris, 1926), p. 42; tr. in Jeffrey Russell (ed.), *Religious Dissent in the Middle Ages* (New York, 1971), p. 45.

110. See Anne Hudson, "Lollardy: The English Heresy?" in her *Lollards and Their Books*, pp. 141–63; and especially Nicholas Watson, "Censorship and Cultural Change in Late Medieval England: Vernacular Theology, The Oxford Translation Debate and Arundel's *Constitutions* of 1409," *Speculum*, 70 (1996), 822–64. In the past few years, a more skeptical view of the significance of the *Constitutions* has emerged, well expressed by Kathryn Kerby-Fulton in an appendix to her latest monograph (published while the present volume was in press), *Books Under Suspicion: Censorship and Tolerance of Revelatory Writing in Late-Medieval England* (Notre Dame, Ind., 2006), pp. 397–401. The "draconian" interpretation of the *Constitutions* offered by Watson and others is questioned, and the point emphasized that "censorship in a manuscript culture is especially difficult to enforce"; hence the authorities may have been "unrealistic" in their supposed ambitions (p. 397). Granted all of this, I feel sufficient evidence remains to postulate the existence of a climate of fear in certain contexts and social sectors at certain times (both pre-and post-Arundel), and the *Constitutions* may be seen as both a symptom and an important stage of the historical process, rather than an

initiating and determining cause without which history would have been very different.

111. See Anne Hudson, "The Debate on Bible Translation, Oxford 1401," in her *Lollards and Their Books*, pp. 67–84.

112. Hudson, "Lollardy: The English Heresy?" p. 145.

113. Hudson, "Lollardy: The English Heresy?" p. 149.

114. *Hoccleve's Works: The Minor Poems*, ed. F. J. Furnivall and I. Gollancz, rev. by J. Mitchell and A. I. Doyle, EETS ES 61 and 73 (London, 1970), p. 13. See further the discussion of the part played by women Lollards in perpetuating their sect by Claire Cross, "'Great Reasoners in Scripture': The Activities of Women Lollards 1380–1530," in Derek Baker (ed.), *Medieval Women*, Studies in Church History, Subsidia, 1 (Oxford, 1978), pp. 359–80.

115. Watson, "Censorship and Cultural Change," p. 858.

116. On which see Hudson, *Premature Reformation*, pp. 371–74.

117. G. R. Owst, *The "Destructorium viciorum" of Alexander Carpenter* (London, 1952), p. 7.

118. Audelay seems to have spent his last days at Haghmond Abbey near Shrewsbury, a house of Austin Canons. See *The Poems of John Audelay*, ed. Ella Keats Whiting, EETS OS 184 (London, 1931), pp. xiv–xv. James Simpson has done much to bring Audelay's achievements as a satirist to our attention. See especially his *The Oxford English Literary History*, vol. 2: 1350–1547. *Reform and Cultural Revolution* (Oxford, 2002), pp. 378–80, and "Saving Satire after Arundel's *Constitutions*: John Audelay's 'Marcol and Solomon,'" in Barr and Hutchinson (eds.), *Text and Controversy*, pp. 387–404.

119. *Poems of Audelay*, ed. Whiting, p. 141.

120. Cf. Maurice Keen, "Wyclif, the Bible, and Transubstantiation," in Anthony Kenny (ed.), *Wyclif in His Times* (Oxford, 1986), pp. 1–16.

121. Swinderby was also protected by John of Gaunt, perhaps (at least in part) on account of his Lollard beliefs, but this is unclear. Gaunt certainly gained a reputation as a defender of Wyclif and Wycliffites; cf. Hudson, *Premature Reformation*, pp. 44, 65–66, 71, 74–75, 110–11.

122. The significance of this text as an appeal to a "knightly constituency" is sensitively explored by Margaret Aston and Colin Richmond in the introduction to their collection of essays, *Lollardy and the Gentry in the Later Middle Ages* (Stroud, 1997), pp. 1–27. Roger Dymmok, whose attack on the *Twelve Conclusions* (the *Liber contra XII errores et hereses Lollardorum*) was addressed to King Richard II in 1395, was appalled by the way in which its framers had presumed to address "public persons," a category which for Dymmok includes kings, dukes, bishops—and academic doctors, like himself. For discussion see Somerset, *Clerical Discourse*, pp. 103–34. She feels that "doctors rank with kings, dukes and bishops only by an extraordinary kind of special pleading" (pp. 106–7), which may well be true in this case, but Dymmok's categorization could have been influenced by the fact that *doctores* operate, or had operated, first as pupils and subsequently as teachers, in the supposedly "public" space of the medieval schools and (assuming they were ordained priests) exercised the public *officium praedicatoris*. Somerset believes Dymmok was attempting to "pitch his text to a non-academic audience," though he did so in a somewhat "halfhearted" way. Wendy Scase argues that Dymmok rather had in mind a predominantly clerical audience: "The Audience and Framers of the *Twelve Conclusions of the Lollards*," in Barr and Hutchinson (eds.), *Text and Controversy*, pp. 283–301.

123. *Johannis de Trokelowe et Henrici de Blanford Chronica et annales*, ed. H. T. Riley (London, 1866), p. 174; cf. Margaret Aston, *Thomas Arundel: A Study of Church Life in the Reign of Richard II* (Oxford, 1967), pp. 328–30.

124. The situation is well addressed by J. A. F. Thomson, who argues that, "however one understands the term 'Lollardy,' its development among the landed class took widely heterogeneous forms, and the extent of their unorthodoxy varied considerably." "Knightly Piety and the Margins of Lollardy," in Aston and Richmond (eds.), *Lollardy and the Gentry*, pp. 95–111 (p. 108). Cf. Antony Tuck's argument that "a wide range of religious attitudes is discernible at Richard II's court," including sympathy for Wycliffite ideas and patronage of the Carthusians; "Carthusian Monks and Lollard Knights: Religious Attitudes at the Court of Richard II," *SAC, Proceedings*, 1 (1984), 149–61.

125. "Royal Priesthood: The Origins of Lollardy," in Wilks, *Wyclif*, pp. 101–16 (p. 109).

126. Wilks, "Royal Priesthood," p. 111.

127. There was much more at stake, then, than "an evangelical style of piety" and a "do-

it-yourself religion," however much such things may have appealed to aristocrats. (I borrow these phrases from Thomson, "Knightly Piety," p. 97.)

128. Wilks, "Royal Priesthood," pp. 106–7.

129. Cf. Wilks, "Royal Priesthood," p. 110.

130. *Historia anglicana*, ed. Riley, ii.215–17. "By 1389" Richard II "was the vigorous and articulate defender of orthodoxy that he was to remain until his death," Nigel Saul has argued, going on to represent the king's treatment of Sturly as deadly serious. Cf. Saul, *Richard II* (New Haven, 1997), pp. 300–303.

131. Sturly's name appears immediately before Chaucer's in Froissart's list of the negotiators sent by Edward III to pursue peace talks with the French at Montreuil-sur-Mer in 1376. Cf. M. M. Crow and C. C. Olson (eds.), *Chaucer Life-Records* (Oxford, 1966), p. 50. The two men had been captured by the French during the campaign of 1359–60; their names appear in a list of prisoners ransomed by the king. Cf. *Chaucer Life-Records*, p. 24.

132. Wilks, "Royal Priesthood," pp. 106–7. Walsingham recounts the anecdote of the deathbed repentance of a Lollard priest at the house of Sir John Montagu, here described as a major protector of Lollards. Having said that he wishes to make his last confession to another priest, and die in the true Catholic manner, Nicholas Hereford (no less) advises this unfortunate individual to confess to God, who alone has the power to bind and unbind. The man dies, accusing his companions of having sinned greatly in denying his last request. Clearly, Walsingham is telling this story as an awful warning of what can happen to those who fall among Lollards. *Historia anglicana*, ed. Riley, ii.159–60.

133. The way in which a "rhetoric of persecution" developed in this period is a fascinating topic in itself. Wyclif himself displayed signs of a persecution complex long before the authorities moved against him; cf. Michael Wilks, "Wyclif and the Great Persecution," *Studies in Church History*, Subsidia 10: Prophecy and Eschatology, ed. Michael Wilks (Oxford, 1994), pp. 39–63. But there was, of course, nothing imaginary about such threats as Richard II's warning to Sturly.

134. *Croniques*, iv, tr. G. Brereton, rev. ed. (Harmondsworth, 1978), pp. 403, 408.

135. *Croniques*, iv, tr. Brereton, pp. 407–8; cf. p. 404. Froissart had known Sturly since their time together at King Edward III's court.

136. *Historia anglicana*, ed. Riley, ii.252–53. Clifford's own sympathies may be inferred from the fact that, at the beginning of Wyclif's investigation by the bishops at Lambeth (1378), he addressed the prelates, instructing them not to pass formal sentence. Here he seems to have been acting as the emissary of the Black Prince's widow, Joan of Kent, and perhaps also of John of Gaunt. For an account of this curious incident see Joseph H. Dahmus, *The Prosecution of John Wyclif* (London, 1952), pp. 68, 70. Cf. Thomas Walsingham, *Historia anglicana*, ed. Riley, i.356; *Chronicon Angliae, 1328–1388*, ed. E. M. Thompson (London, 1874), p. 183.

137. *Lancastrian Kings and Lollard Knights* (Oxford, 1972), p. 212. McFarlane's impatience with views which he sees as a dumbing-down of Wyclif's sophisticated thought should be noted.

138. Cf. Hudson, *Premature Reformation*, p. 114, who finds some logic in Clifford's list.

139. Cf. my discussion in *The Oxford Guides to Chaucer: The Shorter Poems* (Oxford, 1995), pp. 20–21.

140. This will be discussed in Chapter 2 below.

141. *Two Wycliffite Texts*, ed. Anne Hudson, EETS OS 301 (Oxford, 1993), pp. 63–65. Hudson addresses problems concerning this text's historicity, concluding that "on almost every issue where Thorpe can be checked. . . he can be shown to be reasonably reliable" (p. lii). In any case, the crucial ideas here in question are utterly typical of Lollard thought. See further Rita Copeland's important discussion of "William Thorpe and the Historical Record" in her *Pedagogy, Intellectuals and Dissent in the Later Middle Ages: Lollardy and Ideas of Learning* (Cambridge, 2001), pp. 191–219.

142. The standard study of medieval theories concerning the recuperative powers of play is Glending Olson, *Literature as Recreation in the Later Middle Ages* (Ithaca, 1982). For a denial that watching miracle plays is "verry" and "leeueful" "recreacion," see the relevant passage in the *Tretise of Miraclis Pleyinge*, in *Selections from English Wycliffite Writings*, ed. Anne Hudson (Cambridge, 1978), pp. 100, 103. Hudson has some reservations about the extent to which this treatise may be deemed Lollard; see *Selections*, ed. Hudson, p. 188 note on ll. 126–28, along with her *Premature Reformation*, p. 387. In my own view, the second part of the text

is demonstrably Lollard in some crucial aspects, whereas the first part (the work of a different writer) contains certain passages which are at least consonant with Lollard doctrines. On the different dialects of the two parts of the *Tretise* (extant in a single manuscript) see Paul A. Johnson's essay in *ATretise of Miraclis Pleyinge*, ed. Clifford Davidson (Kalamazoo, Mich., 1993), pp. 53–84.

143. According to *The Examination of Sir William of Thorpe*, Thorpe admitted to Archbishop Arundel that he had “prechid and tau³te” both “opinli and priuyli” against the practice of men and women going on pilgrimage to Canterbury, Walsingham, and other such places. *Two Wycliffite Texts*, ed. Hudson, p. 64. On Wycliffite attacks on pilgrimage, see further Hudson, *Premature Reformation*, pp. 307–9.

144. Geoffrey Martin has noted the way in which the chronicler Henry Knighton, the value of whose testimony concerning early Lollardy he defends, presents it as a “native growth, flourishing across several layers of society”; “Knighton's Lollards,” in Aston and Richmond (eds.), *Lollardy and the Gentry*, pp. 28–40 (pp. 37–38). Similarly, Paul Strohm has emphasized that, “as a social phenomenon, the Lollardy of the 1380s and 1390s was drastically mixed—when compared, for example, with the first decade of the fifteenth century, in which it had found its constituency in the trades and a lord like Oldcastle was a distinct anomaly.” “Chaucer's Lollard Joke: History and the Textual Unconscious,” *SAC* 17 (1995), 23–42 (p. 32).

145. Cf. Hudson, *Premature Reformation*, pp. 63–66, 69–70, 76–77, 78–79. The misleading (but commonly made) distinction between Wyclif's Latin work as literate/ textual and his followers' vernacular enterprise as oral has been questioned by Gellrich, *Discourse and Dominion*, pp. 96–97.

146. K. B. McFarlane, *John Wycliffe and the Beginnings of English Nonconformity* (London, 1952, rpt. 1966), p. 104. See further the important qualification of McFarlane's comment by Hudson, *Premature Reformation*, pp. 74–75.

147. To borrow another phrase from McFarlane, *John Wycliffe*, p. 104.

148. It is vital to recognize that dissenting (and indeed heretical) religious thought had existed in Britain long before the time of Wyclif, and continued to exist during, and after, the historical period which saw the rise and decline of Lollardy. At least some of this non-Wycliffite dissent could easily merge with Lollard doctrine, and/or be deemed Lollard by orthodox investigators who were struggling to define the parameters of the new heresy. A fresh approach to this matter has been inaugurated by Kerby-Fulton's *Books Under Suspicion*, which aims to show “a more pluralist view of unorthodoxy” (p. 396). “Wycliffism by itself,” she writes, “cannot sustain” the “massive burden of literary, social, and political agency” that historians (past and present) and literary scholars have imposed upon it. “It was many things, many important things, but it was not omnipresent, it was not unique (it was not even wholly original), and it was not alone in being suspect” (p. 3).

149. In the 1530s Henry VIII executed around 60 people for religious reasons (though in many cases religion and politics were inextricably intertwined), and in the 1550s “Bloody Mary” oversaw the burning of some 280 Protestants throughout England.

150. Rex, *The Lollards* (Basingstoke, Hants., 2002), pp. 148–49.

151. Rex, *The Lollards*, p. xv.

152. Rex, *The Lollards*, p. xv.

153. Rex, *The Lollards*, p. 147.

154. C. R. Sherman, *Imaging Aristotle: Verbal and Visual Representation in Fourteenth-Century France* (Berkeley, 1995), p. 6.

155. On Oresme's milieu and works see Sherman, *Imaging Aristotle*, pp. 6–33; *Maistre Nicole Oresme: Le Livre de politiques d'Aristote*, ed. A. D. Menut, Transactions of the American Philosophical Society, n.s. 60, pt. 6 (Philadelphia, 1970), pp. 5–33.

156. However, this work did not appear in Charles V's lifetime. On its significance see especially F. Guichard Tesson, “Le métier de traducteur et de commentateur au XIV^e siècle d'après Evrart de Conty,” *Le Moyen français*, 24–25 (1990), 131–67.

157. For the proof of Evrart's authorship see F. Guichard Tesson, “Evrart de Conty, auteur de la Glose des Echecs amoureux,” *Le Moyen français*, 8–9 (1981), 111–48. Ongoing work by Caroline Boucher is suggesting that Evrart wrote the poem as well as the commentary on it; hence we may be dealing with a magnificent example of auto-exegesis. For Evrart's literary theory see chapter 6 of my monograph, *Magister amoris: The “Roman de la Rose” and Vernacular Hermeneutics* (Oxford, 2001), on which the above account is based.

158. See F. Glosford Tesson, “La Glose des *Ecchec amoureux*: Un savoir à tendance laïque: comment l’interpréter?” *Fifteenth-Century Studies*, 10 (1984), 229–60. A similar conclusion could be reached about Chaucer’s use of Bersuire, on which see especially Meg Twycross, *The Medieval Anadyomene: A Study in Chaucer’s Mythography*, Medium Ævum Monographs, n.s. 1 (Oxford, 1972).
159. On Pecock’s life and trial see Wendy Scase, *Reginald Pecock*, English Writers of the Late Middle Ages, vol. 3, no. 8 (Aldershot, 1996), pp. 69–146 (especially pp. 115, 124).
160. Christine’s original and Hoccleve’s translation have been edited by T. S. Fenster and M. C. Erler, *Poems of Cupid, God of Love: Christine de Pizan’s “Epistre au dieu d’Amours” and “Dit de la Rose”*; Thomas Hoccleve’s “The Letter of Cupid” (Leiden, 1990).
161. The term is Gontier Col’s, describing the *querelle* over the Rose as a battlefield; *Le Débat*, ed. Hicks, p. 34.
162. See below, pp. 252–53.
163. Cf. Hudson, “Lollardy: The English Heresy?” pp. 141–63.
164. *Le Livre de politiques*, ed. Menut, p. 44.
165. *Chemin de long estude*, quoted by Sherman, *Imaging Aristotle*, p. 7; see also p. 9.
166. A prolific translator who worked under the patronage of the Gloucestershire magnate Sir Thomas Berkeley (1352–1417). I discuss the rarity of such a patronage network in Ricardian England in “Absent Glosses: A Crisis of Vernacular Commentary in Late-Medieval England?” in *Essays in Medieval Studies*, 20: *Texts and Commentaries. The 2003 Proceedings of the Illinois Medieval Association*, ed. William Fahrenbach (Morgantown, W.Va., 2004), pp. 1–17. On the Berkeley family’s literary and political interests see especially Ralph Hanna, “Sir Thomas Berkeley and His Patronage,” *Speculum*, 64 (1989), 878–916; and also his article, “The Difficulty of Ricardian Prose Translation: The Case of the Lollards,” *Modern Language Quarterly*, 51 (1990), 319–40. For Trevisa’s celebration of the *translatio studii* see Ronald Waldron, “Trevisa’s Original Prefaces on Translation: A Critical Edition,” in E. D. Kennedy, Ronald Waldron, and Joseph S. Wittig (eds.), *Medieval English Studies Presented to George Kane* (Woodbridge, 1988), pp. 285–99 (p. 290). See further Waldron’s article “John Trevisa and the Use of English,” *Proceedings of the British Academy*, 74 (1988), 171–202.
167. Chaucer, prologue to *Treatise on the Astrolabe*, in *Riverside Chaucer*, ed. Benson, p. 662. Cf. the sentiments of *Troilus and Criseyde*, II.36–37: “Every wight which that to Rome went / Halt nat o path, or alwey o manere.”
168. By the term *translatio auctoritatis* I mean the process whereby literary prestige moved from Latin into the European vernaculars.

CHAPTER 1. *De officio praedicatoris*

1. Ed. Th.-M. Charland, *Artes praedicandi*, Publications de l’Institut d’études médiévales d’Ottawa, 7 (Paris, 1936), p. 241.
2. As has been demonstrated admirably by Leclercq, “Le Magistère.”
3. On these developments, see especially R. H. and M. A. Rouse, *Preachers, Florilegia and Sermons: Studies on the “Manipulus florum” of Thomas of Ireland* (Toronto, 1979); David d’Avray, “The Transformation of the Medieval Sermon” (D.Phil. thesis, Oxford, 1976); W. A. Pantin, *The English Church in the Fourteenth Century* (Cambridge, 1955), pp. 189–219; and, on the Middle English offshoots, V. A. Gillespie, “The Literary Form of the Middle English Pastoral Manual with Particular Reference to the *Speculum christiani* and Some Related Texts” (D.Phil. thesis, Oxford, 1981).
4. *Liber de eruditione praedicatorum*, i, ed. J. J. Berthier, *B. Humberti de Romanis, De Vita regulari* (Rome, 1888–89), ii.374–76; cf. the translation (from his own forthcoming edition) by Simon Tugwell in *Early Dominicans: Selected Writings*, The Classics of Western Spirituality (London, 1982), pp. 184–85. See further the similar statements in Alan of Lille, *Summa de arte praedicatoria*, i, in PL 210, cols. 111–13, tr. G. R. Evans, *Alan of Lille: The Art of Preaching*, Cistercian Studies Series, xxiii (Kalamazoo, Mich., 1981), pp. 16–22; John Bromyard, *Summa praedicatorum*, s.v. *praedicator* (Venice, 1586), ii.251–62; the pseudo-Aquinas *ars praedicandi*, ed. Harry Caplan, “A Late Medieval Tractate on Preaching,” in A. M. Drummond (ed.), *Studies in Rhetoric and Public Speaking in Honour of James A. Winans* (New York, 1962), pp. 61–90 (p. 72). Mechthild of Magdeburg experienced a vision of the heavenly reward enjoyed by preachers: dressed in “fiery” garments which are “bright as the sun,” garlanded with flowers and seated on splendid thrones, the breath from their mouths ascends to praise the

"heavenly Father" for the "wisdom which he placed" on their tongues, and greets "the Son for his glorious company, for he was a preacher himself." *Das fließende Licht der Gottheit*, iii.1, ed. Schmidt, p. 81; tr. Tobin, p. 104.

5. Summarized from Paris, Bibliothèque Nationale de France, MS Lat. 15372 by Leclercq, "Le Magistère," pp. 130–31.

6. Cited by Leclercq, "Le Magistère," p. 112.

7. Cf. the similar opinions collected by G. R. Owst, *Preaching in Medieval England* (Cambridge, 1926), pp. 4–6.

8. Transcribed from Todi MS 98 by Leclercq, "Le Magistère," pp. 142–43, who dates the *quaestio* between 1280 and 1295.

9. *Contra impugnantes Dei cultum et religionem*, xi, ed. P. Mandonnet (Paris, 1927), p. 16.

10. Vita, ch. 29, tr. Kenelm Foster, *The Life of Saint Thomas Aquinas: Biographical Documents* (London and Baltimore, 1959), p. 47. In practice, however, "the boundaries between preaching and academic disputation" could be more porous, as H. Leith Spencer notes; *English Preaching in the Late Middle Ages* (Oxford, 1993), pp. 42–43, 46–47.

11. Cited by David d'Avray, *Preaching of the Friars: Sermons Diffused from Paris Before 1300* (Oxford, 1985), pp. 181–82.

12. Vita, ch. 29, tr. Foster, p. 47.

13. Cf. Leclercq, "Le Magistère," pp. 145–47.

14. *Utrum praedicare in mortali peccato sit mortale peccatum*, in Chobham, *Summa praedicandi*, pp. 59, 61–63. On Thomas's life see the Introduction to his *Summa confessorum*, ed. F. Broomfield, *Analecta mediaevalia Namurcensia* (Louvain, 1968), pp. xxviii–xxxviii.

15. This is identical to the anonymous *quaestio* from Paris, Bibliothèque Nationale de France, MS Lat. 3108, transcribed by Leclercq, "Le Magistère," pp. 129–30.

16. See the extracts transcribed by Leclercq, "Le Magistère," pp. 116–18.

17. Richard of Middleton O.F.M. considered (in 1286) this problem in an interestingly extreme form: whether or not the preacher is held by virtue of his office to do *everything* that he preaches. Richard's solution is that the preacher is obliged to practice only those things which are necessary for salvation; if he goes beyond them, that is a matter of personal perfection rather than a requirement of his office. Cf. his *Quodlibet II*, art. ii, qu. 31 in *Quodlibeta . . . Ricardi de Mediavilla quaestiones octuaginta continentia* (Brescia, 1591), p. 83. A more ambitious (if rather ill-focused) treatment of a version of this same question—*utrum predicans tenetur facere omnia que predicat*—is included in the fourth quodlibet (dated 1304) of Thomas of Bailly, who served as Chancellor of the University of Paris from 1316 until his death in 1326. In his long preamble to the central issue, Thomas notes that a preacher may preach what is false and erroneous (i.e., in warning his congregation against certain courses of action), in which case he shouldn't practice what he preaches. Furthermore, he may address different states (*status*) in society—for example, married people, members of religious orders, or prelates—which have various kinds of behavior appropriate to them; obviously he is under no obligation to perform actions which are not appropriate to his own *status*. The chief interest of this *quaestio* lies in the extent to which Thomas explores the possibility that a preacher who does not practice what he preaches may be of some benefit to others, and—even though himself in mortal sin—may earn some sort of credit from an action which aids his neighbors. *Quodlibet iv*, qu. 13, in *Thomas de Bailly, Quodlibets*, ed. P. Glorieux, *Textes philosophiques du moyen âge* (Paris, 1960), pp. 319–24.

18. Transcribed from Paris, Bibliothèque nationale de France, MS Lat. 17485, by Leclercq, "Le Magistère," pp. 124–27. See further Gerard's handling of similar issues in his *Summa*, discussed on p. 00 below.

19. *Regulae pastoralis liber*, i.2, in PL 77, cols. 15C–D; tr. H. Davis, *St. Gregory the Great: Pastoral Care*, Ancient Christian Writers, 11 (Westminster, Md., 1950), pp. 23–24.

20. Cf. the fear of St. Augustine that certain people may "condemn the word of God which is preached to them alongside with the preacher himself." *De doctrina christiana*, IV.xxvii, ed. G. M. Green, CSEL 80 (Vienna, 1963), p. 166; tr. D. W. Robertson, *On Christian Doctrine: St. Augustine* (Indianapolis, 1958), p. 165.

21. *Regulae pastoralis liber*, i.2, in PL 77, col. 16A; tr. Davis, p. 24.

22. *Summa praedicandi*, ed. Morenzoni, pp. 61–62; cf. Leclercq, "Le Magistère," pp. 129–30.

23. *Summa quaestionum*, art. XI, qu. 5: *Utrum homo peccator possit esse doctor huius scientiae*; Paris ed., fols. 79v–81r; Ferrara ed., pp. 199–201.

24. *Glossa ordinaria* on Philipians 1:15–19 (*Biblia glossata*, vi.575–76).

25. Chrysostom, *In Matt.* 16; *PG* 57, col. 243.

26. *Physics*, vii.3 (247a–248a), as in *Aristotelis opera cum Averrois commentaria* (Venice, 1562–74), iv.322r–3r.

27. Thomas Aquinas, *Super Physicam* vii.6, as translated by R. J. Blackwell, R. J. Spaeth, and W. E. Thirlkel in *St. Thomas Aquinas: Commentary on Aristotle's Physics* (London, 1963), p. 446. Cf. Averroes, “cognitio existit in nobis in principio per quietem anime, et rectitudinem accidentium” (*Aristotelis opera*, iv.323r).

28. *Aristotelis opera*, iv.322v. Aristotle had proceeded to note that the passions may hinder the operation of the soul's intellectual part, as when a man who is sleeping or drunk or diseased is unable to use his intellect. But there is, as Aquinas explains, a habitual potency “for the suitability of knowledge in man”; i.e., the potential for restoration to the appropriate state in which he could use his knowledge. And therefore, exercise of the moral virtues, through which the passions which disturb the reason “are curbed, is especially effective for acquiring knowledge” (Aquinas, *Commentary on Aristotle's “Physics,”* p. 447). One concomitant of this (as Aristotle points out) is that in matters of learning and making judgments children are inferior to adults owing to the great amount of restlessness and motion in their souls (*Physics*, 248a). This is why the young make poor listeners of moral science—and, indeed, of the speculative side of the science of theology, as Henry will argue elsewhere, in his *quaestio* on whether or not the young man can be an *auditor* of theology; on which see my discussion, “The *Accessus* Extended: Henry of Ghent on the Transmission and Reception of Theology,” in Mark Jordan and Kent Emery (eds.), *Ad Litteram: Authoritative Texts and their Medieval Readers* (Notre Dame, Ind., 1992), pp. 275–326 (pp. 304–11).

29. *Politics*, i.13 (1260a–b).

30. Compare the notion of the preacher as God's instrument or “instrumental cause,” working under the ultimate control of the “primary efficient cause,” God, as found in certain “Aristotelian prologues” to *artes praedicandi*. See for example the prologues of Robert of Basevorn, Ralph Higden, pseudo-Aquinas, and Martin of Cordoba. Basevorn, *Forma praedicandi*, in Charland, *Artes praedicandi*, pp. 233–34; *The “Ars componendi sermones” of Ranulph Higden*, O.S.B., ed. Margaret Jennings (Leiden, 1991), pp. 4–6; Caplan, “A Late Medieval Tractate,” p. 73; P. F. Rubio, “*Ars praedicandi* de Fray Martin de Córdoba,” *La Ciudad de Dios*, 172 (1959), 331–32. On the “Aristotelian prologue” in general, and the ways in which the Aristotelian theory of instrumental causality figured in late medieval discussions of authorship and *auctoritas*, see Minnis, *Medieval Theory of Authorship*. On the use of such prologues in arts of preaching, see Margaret Jennings, “The *Ars componendi sermones* of Ranulph Higden,” in J. J. Murphy (ed.), *Medieval Eloquence: Studies in the Theory and Practice of Medieval Rhetoric* (Berkeley, 1978), pp. 112–26 (pp. 115–16).

31. *Biblia glossata*, v.71.

32. *Physics*, ii.9 (200b).

33. *Aristotelis opera* (Venice ed., iv.85r).

34. Ps-Chrysostom, *In Matt.* 10; *PG* 46, cols. 684–85.

35. *Regulae pastoralis liber*, i.1–2; *PL* 57, cols. 14–16.

36. *Biblia glossata*, vi.967–68. Cf. Humbert of Romans, who, citing Acts 1:1, argues that it is a greater thing to act and to teach than it is just to act. *De eruditione praedicatorum*, i, ed. Berthier, *Humberti opera*, ii.388; tr. Tugwell, *Early Dominicans*, p. 199. Henry then draws on Chrysostom's exegesis of Matthew 5:13 and 5:14 (“You are the salt of the earth” and “You are the light of the world”): you are first called “salt” and then “light,” because the first thing to do is to live well and the second, to teach well. Actually this is Pseudo-Chrysostom, *In Matt.* 10; *PG* 46, col. 685.

37. The problem of the vainglorious *doctor* is singled out by Henry in his first quodlibet, qu. 34. There he states that the divine *doctor* should in his teaching seek principally the honor of God. If he puts his own honor first, he sins mortally. See *Quodlibet 1*, ed. R. Macken (Leuven and Paris, 1979), pp. 193–94. In such discussions vainglory is usually understood as the inappropriate pride which a preacher may take in his own performance. A different variety may be illustrated with an anecdote from the *vita* of the Viennese Beguine Agnes Blannbekin (d. 1315). “A certain friar preached about Blessed Francis and commended him much too boastfully, preferring him to Blessed Peter and other apostles and saints, so that the audience was scandalized.” He is promptly reprimanded by one of the prelates present, with the approval of the other friars. Cf. Wiethaus, *Agnes Blannbekin, Viennese Beguine*, p. 66.

38. *Biblia glossata*, vi.576.

39. He does not name Henry at this point, but the verbal echoes of Henry's treatment are unmistakable, as has been pointed out by Beryl Smalley, "Gerard of Bologna and Henry of Ghent," *RTAM* 22 (1955), 125–29. It should be emphasized, however, that despite this and other criticisms Gerard is heavily dependent on Henry, as Smalley notes.

40. *Summa Gerardi Bononiensis*, qu. 6, art. 2; ed. P. De Vooght, *Les sources de la doctrine chrétienne d'après les théologiens du XIVe siècle et du début du XVe* (Paris, 1954), pp. 373–74.

41. *Nicomachean Ethics*, ii.4 (1105a).

42. *Aristotelis opera*; Venice ed., iii.22v.

43. Thomas Aquinas, *Super Ethicam*, ii.4, ed. R. M. Spiazzi (Turin, 1949), p. 80; tr. C. I. Litzinger (Chicago, 1964), p. 130.

44. *Aristotelis opera*; Venice ed., iii.22v.

45. Text in Thomas Aquinas, *Super Ethicam*; ed. Spiazzi, p. 79.

46. Aquinas, *Super Ethicam*, i.3; ed. Spiazzi, p. 11.

47. Thomas Aquinas, *Summa theologiae*, 1a 2ae, qu. 58, art. 2, resp. (xxiii.69).

48. *Nicomachean Ethics*, vi.13 (1144b), and see also Thomas's comment on this passage, *Super Ethicam*, ed. Spiazzi, p. 346.

49. Thomas Aquinas, *Summa theologiae*, 1a 2ae, qu. 58, art. 5 (xxiii.77). See further the discussion by H. V. Jaffa, *Thomism and Aristotelianism* (Chicago, 1952), pp. 31–34.

50. Aquinas, *Super Ethicam*, ii.4; ed. Spiazzi, p. 81; tr. Litzinger, p. 131.

51. *Summa praedicandi*, ed. Morenzoni, pp. 61–62; cf. pp. 39–40 above.

52. *Summa praedicandi*, ed. Morenzoni, pp. 61–62; cf. Paris, Bibliothèque Nationale de France, MS Lat. 3108, transcribed by Leclercq, "Le Magistère," pp. 129–30.

53. It should also be noted that the *praedicator-lector* distinction simply did not fit the pattern Henry wished to follow in the prologue to his *Summa*, in tracing and describing the chain of efficient causality from author to audience. Since he had taken the *doctor* as the central subject of an entire article (within his sequence *auctor-doctor-auditor*, in articles IX through XII), this distinction did not have any structural utility.

54. See for example William of Pagula, *Oculus sacerdotis*, III pars., in Oxford, Bodleian Library, MS Rawlinson A370, fols. 47r–8v (introductory), 55r–8r (*De predicatione sacerdotis*), and 89v–90r (against ignorant priests). Cf. Pantin, *English Church*, pp. 198–89; John Bromyard, *Summa praedicantium*, s.v. *praedicator* and *praelatio* (Venice ed., ii, 251v–79v); William Peraldus (Peyraut), *Summa vitiorum*, tract IV, pars ii, capi. 10 and 14 (on greed for reward and for knowledge), tract. VI, pars iii, cap. 7 (*De doctrina bona et vita mala*, etc.), in the *Summae virtutum ac vitiorum* (Antwerp, 1588), ii, fols. 71r–2r, 116v–18r; John Mirk, *Manuale sacerdotis*, in Oxford, Bodleian Library, MS Bodley 549, fols. 121r–281r, cf. the brief quotation in Pantin, *English Church*, pp. 215–17; John Mirk's *Instructions for Parish Priests*, ed. G. Kristensson, *Lund Studies in English*, 49 (Lund, 1974), pp. 67–70; the *Cibus anime*, in Oxford, University College MS 60, fol. 147r; also the (largely orthodox) materials collected together under the heading "Prechour" in the Lollard *Rosarium theologiae*, in *The Middle English Translation of the "Rosarium Theologiae"*, ed. C. von Nolcken, *Middle English Texts*, x (Heidelberg, 1979), pp. 85–92.

55. Chobham, *Summa praedicandi*, pp. 54–73; Basevorn, *Forma praedicandi*, i–v, ed. Charland, *Artes praedicandi*, pp. 238–43; tr. L. Krul, in *Three Medieval Rhetorical Arts*, ed. J. J. Murphy (Berkeley, 1971), pp. 120–26; Waleys, *De modo componendi sermones*, i, in *Artes praedicandi*, ed. Charland, pp. 329–41; Higden, *Ars componendi sermones*, ed. Jennings, pp. 5, 7–11. There is little if anything of relevance in the *artes praedicandi* of the Englishmen Alexander of Ashby and Richard of Thetford, on whom see the relevant material in Chapter 2.

56. *Forma praedicandi*, iv, ed. Charland, *Artes praedicandi*, pp. 241–42; tr. Krul, p. 124.

57. Cf. Thomas Waleys, who cites the view of the *doctores theologiae* that anyone preaching whilst in a state of mortal sin sins in that very act of preaching. *De modo componendi sermones*, i, ed. Charland, *Artes praedicandi*, p. 330.

58. *Forma praedicandi*, iv, ed. Charland, p. 241; tr. Krul, pp. 123–24. Cf. Thomas of Chobham's use of this distinction, discussed on pp. 39–40 above. It should be noted, however, that some schoolmen suspected that these categories were too straightforward: if the *lector* is specified to be a teacher of theology, then the distinction is put under considerable pressure. Some preach by dint of their prelatial office (*ex officio prelationis*), notes Thomas of Bailly, while others preach by dint of their magisterial office (*ex officio magisterii*), such as doctors of theology who have the authority to expound sacred Scripture, and consequently to preach,

because such theology is, in a sense, preaching since here all true preaching originates. Thomas goes on to cite the opinion of “some” who believe that, if a preacher acts in a way which manifestly is contrary to what he preaches, then he commits a new sin *ex officio prelationis* but not *ex officio magisterii*. This does not seem to be true, Thomas declares; rather, a new sin is committed in respect of both offices. The office of preaching is ordained to lead to eternal life. But this is also the objective (*finis*) of preaching’s very source, holy Scripture, which is written “that you may believe and that believing you may have life” (cf. John 20:31). That objective is obstructed by the person who preaches the contrary of what he does notoriously. It would seem, then, that the *prelatus* and the *magister* have responsibilities in common. *Quodlibet* iv, qu. 13; ed. Glorieux, pp. 320, 321.

59. *Summa theologiae*, 3a, qu. 65, art. 3 (lvi.150–55).

60. *Summa theologiae*, 3a, qu. 67, art. 2, resp. (lvii.58–59).

61. *Tractatus de praeparatione ad missam*, cap. 1, 3, in *Bonaventurae opera*, viii, 100; tr. José de Vinck, *The Works of Bonaventure, translated from the Latin* (Paterson, N.J., 1966), iii.221.

62. *Alexandri summa*, pars IV, qu. 35, mem. 4: *utrum sacerdos malus in moribus possit consecrare* (138v).

63. In discussing Thomas Aquinas’s use of this authority (at *Summa theologiae*, 3a, qu. 82, art. 5, sed con.; lix.113), Thomas Gilby notes that it comes rather from Paschasius Radbertus (d. c. 860), *De corp. et sang. dom.*, 12 (*PL* 120, col. 1310). For its congruence with claims made by Augustine in his dispute with the original Donatists, see the discussion in our introductory chapter.

64. *Sent.* IV, dist. XIII, cap. 1, 1; Lombard, *Lib. sent.* (ii.311).

65. *Summa theologiae*, 3a, qu. 82, art. 5: *utrum malus sacerdos eucharistiam consecrare possit* (lix.112–15).

66. The fact that Peter Lombard had afforded this passage considerable importance ensured that it attracted a substantial body of commentary; cf. pp. 60–61, 234, 236, 404n, 436n, below.

67. As Aquinas says in *Summa theologiae*, 3a, qu. 82, art. 1: *de ministro huius sacramenti*, it is for priests alone to consecrate this sacrament; “on a priest at his ordination is conferred the power of consecrating in the person of Christ” (lix.103). Devout layfolk do not have this sacramental power, and hence cannot consecrate. As far as the *dispensing* of the sacrament is concerned (e.g., its being conveyed to its recipient by someone other than a priest, following consecration), that too may not be done by layfolk. *Summa theologiae*, 3a, qu. 82, art. 3: *utrum dispensatio huius sacramenti pertineat solum ad sacerdotem* (lix.107).

68. *Tractatus de praeparatione ad missam*, ch. 1, 5–6, in *Bonaventurae opera*, viii.101; tr. de Vinck, *Works*, iii.223–24.

69. This may be influenced by the following statement, attributed to Jerome (cf. in part *Ep.* 42; *PL* 30, col. 298) in the *Alexandri summa* (pars IV, qu. 46, mem. 5, 5) and found also in Aquinas (*Summa theologiae*, 3a, qu. 80, art. 5, 2; xlix.49, 51): “What hast thou to do with women, thou that speakest familiarly with God? Say, priest, say, cleric, how dost thou kiss the Son of God with the same lips that have kissed a harlot? O Judas, thou hast betrayed the son of man with a kiss.” From this it would appear that the fornicator who comes to Christ’s table sins just as Judas did, for (as Aquinas puts it) “both offer offence to Christ under the guise of friendship” (though “not as to the extent of the crime”). Aquinas goes on to suggest that this comparison applies to other sinners as well as fornicators.

70. *Tractatus de praeparatione ad missam*, ch. 1, 7, in *Bonaventurae opera*, viii.101. Aquinas reaches a similar conclusion in his *quaestio* on whether nocturnal pollution hinders one from receiving the sacrament: *Summa theologiae*, 3a, qu. 80, art. 7 (lix.56–65). Cf. Peter of Tarantasia, *In IV Sent.*, dist. X, qu. 2, art. 3 (*In lib. sent.*, iv.104), and especially Peter of la Palud, *In IV Sent.*, dist. IX, qu. 3, resp. (Salamanca ed., p. 118). See further Dyan Elliott, *Fallen Bodies: Pollution, Sexuality, and Demonology in the Middle Ages* (Philadelphia, 1999), especially pp. 14–34, and McGuire, “Sexual Control and Spiritual Growth.”

71. *Tractatus de praeparatione ad missam*, ch. 1, 5, in *Bonaventurae opera*, viii.101; tr. de Vinck, *Works*, iii.222–23.

72. The recipient, to be sure, had his own problems, as is obvious from the stock question on whether a priest should deny the body of Christ to a sinner who asks for it. Here familiar discourses concerning the public and the private operate. For instance, Aquinas distinguishes between sinners who are “notorious” and those with secret sins. To notorious sinners “holy Communion should not be given even if they ask for it.” However, if one is dealing with

hidden, not open sinners (*non sunt manifesti peccatores, sed occulti*), holy Communion should not be denied them if they request it.” Aquinas adds that a priest who is aware of a hidden crime “can privately warn the secret sinner,” or *in publico* warn the congregation in general terms “against approaching the Lord’s table until they have repented and been reconciled to the Church. Thereafter Communion is not to be refused even to public sinners (*publicis peccatoribus*), especially at the hour of death.” *Summa theologiae*, 3a, qu. 80, art. 6 (lix.55). Peter of Tarantasia says that if a secret sinner seeks to receive the Eucharist privately the priest can refuse him, and warn him not to receive it publicly. However, if such a sinner does seek to receive it publicly, then he may not be denied, because as a Christian he has the right to ask for it, and the dispenser has nothing which he can use against him publicly. However, if the sinner is notorious, then he should be refused, whether he seeks the Eucharist in private or in public. *In IV Sent.*, dist. X, qu. 2, art. 4 (iv.105).

73. Albert, *In IV Sent.*, dist. XIII, art. 31: *an missa boni sacerdotis sit melior quam missa mali sacerdotis*, in *Alberti opera*, xxix.390–91; Bonaventure, *In IV Sent.*, dist. XIII, art. 1, qu. 4: *Utrum melior sit missa boni sacerdotis quam mali*, in *Bonaventurae opera*, iv.306–7; Aquinas, *Summa theologiae*, 3a, qu. 82, art. 6: *Utrum missa sacerdotis mali minus valeat quam missa sacerdotis boni* (lix.114–17).

74. “Dicendum, quod missae ratione substantialis quod in missa est, aequales sunt: sed ratione illius quod adjunctum est, et est opus hominis, inaequales: et sic melior est missa boni” (*Alberti opera*, xxvix.391).

75. Bonaventure makes this point in his *responsio*; Albert offers it in one of his contrary opinions, which are later affirmed in his *solutio*.

76. *In IV Sent.*, dist. XIII, art. 1, qu. 4, resp.; *Bonaventurae opera*, iv.307.

77. *In IV Sent.*, dist. XIX, qu. 1, art. 2, quaestiu. 2 and sol. 2; *Aquinatis opera*, vii.2.825, 826.

78. *De baptismo contra Donatistas*, I.xii.20 (PL 43, col. 120); *Contra Epistolam Parmeniani libri tres*, ii.12 (PL 43, col. 69).

79. Many of these issues are treated well in Thomas of Chobham’s question *utrum ille qui orat in mortali peccato peccet mortaliter*. “Some” say that a priest is a *publica persona* who prays not in his own person but *in persona ecclesie*. But it is not as simple as that, Thomas says, and proceeds to provide a more elaborate explanation. A prayer may have value not due to any agency on the part of the person praying, but insofar as its words have been instituted by the Church and therefore have a certain virtue which is pleasing to God. This applies when the person praying has the *officium orandi*. Others don’t have this office, yet pray while living in mortal sin—and it seems that they always sin. But a distinction must be made between those who pray 1. “good and well,” 2. “good and not well,” 3. “well and not good,” and 4. “neither well nor good.” In the first category may be found the saints, in the second those who pray that God will assist them in good preaching so that they may prosper materially, in the third those who pray for future prosperity so that they may then give alms, in the fourth those who pray for base things so that they may delight in them. Chobham, *Summa praedicandi*, pp. 63–65.

80. Ascertaining the “extent” or “degree” of Lollardy in certain Middle English texts constitutes a major procedural problem in modern scholarship. For Anne Hudson’s discussion of works that fall within what she calls the “grey area” between “radical orthodoxy and conservative Lollardy,” see “Some Problems of Identity and Identification in Wycliffite Writings,” in A. S. G. Edwards and Derek Pearsall (eds.), *Middle English Prose: Essays in Bibliographical Problems* (New York, 1981), pp. 81–90, and also her *Premature Reformation*, pp. 21–24, 398, 408, 422–25, etc. See further Jill C. Havens, “Shading the Grey Area: Determining Heresy in Middle English Texts,” in Barr and Hutchinson (eds.), *Text and Controversy*, pp. 337–52. To all this may be added the challenge posed by the notion of a “left wing of orthodoxy” (a phrase previously used by Norman Tanner), as recently brought to the debate by Kerby-Fulton in her *Books Under Suspicion*; see esp. p. 401.

81. Wyclif, *Select English Works*, ed. Arnold, iii.221, 223.

82. Wyclif, *Select English Works*, ed. Arnold, iii.227. For more extreme Lollard views on this subject, see above pp. 19–20 and below, pp. 136–37, 231–36, 404–5n.

83. Wyclif, *Select English Works*, ed. Arnold, iii.224–25.

84. *Summa theologiae*, 3a, qu. 82, art. 9 (lix.124–27).

85. Cf. *Contra litteras Petiliani Donatistae*, III.ix.10 (PL 43, col. 353): “Nemo gloriatur, nec in homine bono; nemo bona Dei fugiat, nec in homine malo.”

86. Gratian, *Decretum*, 1a pars, dist. xxxii, C. 5; ed. Friedberg, *Corpus iuris canonici*, i.117.

87. At this point Aquinas is following Peter Lombard, who had said that while all priests receive the key of binding and loosing, they do not have it rightly and worthily unless they follow the apostolic life and teaching. *Lib. Sent.* IV, dist. XIX, cap. 1, 8 (ii.367).

88. Here Aquinas draws on *Decretales Gregorii IX*, Lib. III, tit. ii, cap. 10; *Corpus iuris canonici*, ii.457. Bonaventure's discussion of the same issue seeks to affirm the value of such legal process. Noting canon law's prohibition of hearing the mass of heretics, schismatics, simoniacs and notorious fornicators, he states that, in the first instance, this is a just punishment of their sins, because they are not worthy to confect—and, if they confect, they are not worthy to be heard. Second, by being shamed in this way, they may return from guilt to grace. Third, on seeing such punishment, others may be deterred from imitating them. Hence this is a work of justice, mercy, and providence. *In IV Sent.*, dist. XIII, art. 1, qu. 4; *Bonaventurae opera*, iv.306–7.

89. *In IV Sent.*, dist. XIII, H, art. 32; *Alberti opera*, xxix.391–92.

90. On fornicator priests see Peter Lombard, *Lib. sent.*, IV, dist. xiii, cap.1, 1–3 (ii.311–12); on heretics and excommunicates, see *Lib. sent.* IV, dist. xiii, cap. 1, 4–6 (ii.312–13).

91. *Lib. sent.* IV, dist. XIII, cap. 1, 4 (ii.313); also dist. XIX, cap. 3, 1–2 (ii.369) and cap. 4, 4 (ii.371).

92. “Magister hic falsum dicat in littera”; “Magister non est sustinendus”: *Alberti opera*, xxix.390.

93. *In IV Sent.*, dist. XIII, H, art. 33: *Quomodo intelligendum sit illud, “Maledicam benedictionibus vestris”?*; *Alberti opera*, xxix.395.

94. Albert gives no details as to what sort of simulation he might have in mind.

95. In the sense of, unknown to a congregation or the recipient of a sacrament.

96. *Summa theologiae*, 3a, qu. 65, art. 3, ad 4 (Ivi.154–55).

97. *Summa theologiae*, 3a, qu. 65, art. 4, resp. (Ivi.156–57).

98. Peter wrote his *Sentences* commentary in Paris, 1259–64. For some time French provincial of the Order of Preachers, he became Archbishop of Lyons in 1272 and Cardinal-Bishop of Ostia in 1273. There is little which is original in his treatment of the issues under discussion; I draw on his account as a typical, though especially cogent, example of the relevant reasoning in the golden age of Parisian theology.

99. *In IV Sent.*, dist. V, qu. 3, art. 1 (iv.64–66).

100. *In IV Sent.*, dist. V, qu. 3, art. 2 (iv.66).

101. Discussed above, in our introductory chapter.

102. Perhaps an echo of Augustine, *In Joann.* v, on John 1:33 (*PL* 35, col. 1422).

103. *Lib. sent.*, IV, dist. V, cap. 1 (ii.263–64). Cf. *In Joann.* V, 7 (*PL* 35, col. 1417). Augustine explains that when the Lord baptizes through ministers, it is the Lord and not the ministers who effects the baptism. “For it is one thing to baptize in the role of a minister; another to baptize with power” (cap. 6). “Even if a man should be evil and happen to have the ministry, . . . God who has kept the power of baptism for himself allows baptism to be performed through him” (cap. 7); “whether a good servant were to baptize as a minister or a bad servant were to baptize as a minister, that man who was being baptized would know that he was baptized only by him who kept for himself the power of baptizing” (cap. 8). *St Augustine, Tractates on the Gospel of John, 1–10*, tr. John W. Rettig, Fathers of the Church, 78 (Washington, D.C., 1988), pp. 113, 114–15. Aquinas uses the same tractate in his more general question, *utrum per malos ministros sacramenta conferri possint: Summa theologiae*, 3a, qu. 64, art. 5 (Ivi.114–19). Cf. the discussion of this text in our introductory chapter. All of this is, of course, highly reminiscent of key arguments in Augustine's *De baptismo contra Donatistas*, as cited on p. 360, n. 81.

104. *In IV Sent.*, dist. V, qu. 3, art. 3; iv.66–67.

105. *In IV Sent.*, dist. 5, qu. 3, art. 1, resp. to sub-quest. 4; iv.66.

106. Albert the Great, *In IV Sent.* dist. V, A, art. 1, sed contra and solutio; *Alberti opera*, xxix.104, 105.

107. From the point of view of the person baptized, says Albert the Great, it doesn't matter whether the baptism is carried out by a good or bad person. From the point of view of the person baptizing, if he is in mortal sin this must be either notorious or secret (*occultus*) sin. The notorious sinner should baptize only if there is no other baptized person to do the job, and hence it's a matter of necessity; otherwise he sins mortally, due to the scandal he creates and his usurpation of the sacrament. In the case of the person whose sin is hidden, if

he fears the scandal will ensue if it becomes known, but the baptism is a matter of necessity, then he does not sin in baptizing. If he fears scandal and this is not a case of necessity, then he can baptize albeit with trepidation. But if he does not fear scandal, and this is not a case of necessity, then he sins gravely in presuming to baptize. *Alberti opera*, xxix.105.

108. *Summa theologiae*, 3a, qu. 67, art. 4: *utrum mulier possit baptizare* (lvii.62–65).

109. This had been cited by Peter Lombard, *Lib. sent.*, IV, dist. VI, cap. 1 (ii.268). Here the context makes clear the view that a woman can baptize *in necessitate*.

110. Waldensians were accused of not believing in transubstantiation, refusing to swear by oaths, promoting a vernacular Bible, denying the existence of purgatory, and affirming the crucial importance of preaching—all beliefs later associated with Lollardy. See Audisio, *Waldensian Dissent*, pp. 11, 12–13, 48–49, 54–55. On Donatism in Waldensianism and Catharism see the discussion and notes in our introductory chapter.

111. Pars IV, qu. 35, mem. 2: *utrum laicus iustus habet potestatem consecrandi* (137v–138r).

112. Bonaventure, *In IV Sent.*, dist. XIII, art. 1, qu. 2; *Bonaventurae opera*, iv.304–5.

113. On the importance of 1 Peter 2:9 within Lollard advocacy of the priesthood of all members of their *vera ecclesia* see below, pp. 219, 231.

114. See our discussion of this matter in our introductory chapter and also in Chapter 2 below.

115. See below, pp. 223–24, 265, 309.

116. *Summa theologiae*, 3a, qu. 63, art. 1 (lvi.79). “It is for him who institutes the signs to determine which particular sign is to be used to represent that thing,” explains Aquinas elsewhere: 3a, qu. 60, art. 5 (lvi.19).

117. Pars IV, qu. 35, mem. 2–5 (137v–140r).

118. *Contra Epist. Pamen.* ii.13; *PL* 43, col. 70.

119. *Summa theologiae*, 3a, qu. 82, art. 8; lix.123. For discussion of this crucial doctrine in the context of the denial of ordination to women, see below, pp. 216, 223–24, 225, 231, etc.

120. Cf. Albert the Great’s statement, cited on p. 65 above.

121. The power of the keys may be regarded as a necessary consequence of the sacerdotal character. In essence it is identical with the power to consecrate and to offer the sacrifice of the mass; one and the same sacerdotal power are applied to different outcomes in the different sacraments. As Aquinas puts it, “the *character*, the power of consecrating, and the power of the keys are one and the same essentially, but differ logically” inasmuch as they are “referred to different effects.” *In IV Sent.*, dist. XVIII, qu. 1, art. 1, sol. 2, ad 1um; *Aquinatis opera*, vii.2.809.

122. *De sacramento poenitentiae*, iv, in *Guilelmi Alverni Episcopi Parisiensis Opera omnia* (Paris, 1674), i.462.

123. Cf. G. H. Joyce, “Keys, Power of,” *Catholic Encyclopedia*, ed. C. G. Herbermann, E. A. Pace, et al. (New York, 1907–12), viii.631–63 (p. 632).

124. *In IV Sent.*, dist. XVIII, qu. 1, art. 1, sol. 1, ad 1um; *Aquinatis opera*, vii.2.809.

125. *In IV Sent.*, dist. XVII, qu. 3, art. 1, conc. 3 (p. 206). Peter started to read the *Sentences* in Paris c. 1310; he began lecturing on book iv (by far the most original part of this commentary) before 1314, though the extant version probably was not finalized before the beginning of 1315. Peter was appointed Patriarch of Jerusalem in 1329.

126. *Lib. sent.*, IV, dist. XVII, cap. 1, 5 and cap. iv, 13 (ii.344, 355).

127. *Lib. sent.*, IV, dist. XVII, cap. 1, 11 (ii.345).

128. *Lib. sent.*, IV, dist. XVIII, cap. 4, 6 (ii.358).

129. *Lib. sent.*, IV, dist. XVIII, cap. 4, 1 (ii.357).

130. It may be added that in the Lombard’s view a priest also binds when he imposes “on those who confess a satisfactory penance” and looses when he remits some part of the penance imposed either by himself or by another confessor.

131. Marcia L. Colish, *Peter Lombard* (Leiden, 1994), pp. 602–3.

132. Colish, *Peter Lombard*, p. 589.

133. *Lib. sent.*, IV, dist. XVII, cap. 3, 8 (ii.350). Tr. E. F. Rogers, *Peter Lombard and the Sacramental System* (New York, 1976), p. 184.

134. *Lib. sent.*, IV, dist. XVII, cap. 1, 13 (ii.346).

135. *Lib. sent.*, IV, dist. XVII, cap. 4, 1 (ii.351). “From these and many other testimonies it is made clear and established beyond a doubt that sins are to be confessed first to God, next, to the priest, and if he is not available, to a companion”: cap. 4, 8 (ii.353). Tr. Rogers,

136. Such statements are not, in my view, given sufficient weight in Colish's impressive discussion of the Lombard's contritionism.

137. Cf. Paul F. Palmer, *Sacraments and Forgiveness: History and Doctrinal Development of Penance, Extreme Unction and Indulgences*, Sources of Christian Theology, ii (Westminster, Md., 1959), p. 201.

138. *In IV Sent.*, dist. XVIII, pars 1, art. 2, qu. 1; *Bonaventurae opera*, iv.473.

139. See especially *Summa theologiae*, 3a, qu. 84, art. 3 (lx.10–19).

140. *Summa theologiae*, lx.15. See further Aquinas's statement in his *Sentences* commentary, *In IV Sent.*, dist. XVIII, qu. 1, art. 3, sol. 1: "God alone directly remits guilt (*culpa*), and Baptism acts through His power instrumentally, as an inanimate instrument, and the priest as an animate instrument, such as a servant is, according to the Philosopher" [cf. Aristotle, *Ethics*, viii.11]. *Aquinatis opera*, vii.2.813.

141. Duns Scotus pushed the doctrine a step further by asserting that the sacrament consists principally in the absolution of the priest, because confession, contrition, and satisfaction are not integral parts in the sacrament but only necessary "previous dispositions" to the reception of divine grace and forgiveness. Cf. Palmer, *Sacraments and Forgiveness*, pp. 215–19.

142. In his *Sentences* commentary; *In IV Sent.*, dist. XVIII, qu. 1, art. 3, sol. 1, ad 1um; *Aquinatis opera*, vii.2.813. Similar statements may be found in the *Alexandri summa*, pars IV, qu. 79, mem. 7, art. 1, resp. (319v), and Bonaventure's *Sentences* commentary; *In IV Sent.*, dist. XIX, art. 1, qu. 2 (*Bonaventurae opera*, iv.501–3).

143. *In IV Sent.*, dist. XIX, qu. 1, art. 2, quaestunc. 2; *Aquinatis opera*, vii.2.825.

144. *In IV Sent.*, dist. XIX, qu. 1, art. 2, sol. 1; *Aquinatis opera*, vii.2.826. True, Peter Lombard had said that the power of binding and of loosing was granted to priests only (*Lib. sent.*, IV, dist. XIX, cap. 1, 8; ii.367), but his accommodation of the wise layman as a possible substitute-confessor left open a loophole which Aquinas *cum suis* were anxious to close.

145. *In IV Sent.*, dist. XVII, qu. 3, art. 3, sol. 2; *Aquinatis opera*, vii.2.799. Similar views are expressed in the *Alexandri summa* and the *Sentences* commentaries of Duns Scotus and Durandus of St. Pourçain. In considering such statements it should be remembered that confession was a quite rare event in this period for many, if not most, of the faithful—as is evidenced by the Fourth Lateran Council's attempt to mandate one confession per year.

146. *In IV Sent.*, dist. XX, qu. 1, art. 1, quaestunc. 2, 3; *Aquinatis opera*, vii.2.839.

147. *Summa contra gentiles*, IV.72, 9–10, in *Aquinatis opera*, v.364; tr. Charles J. O'Neill, *On the Truth of the Catholic Faith: "Summa contra gentiles"* (New York, 1957), iv.280.

148. *Summa contra gentiles*, IV.72, 11, in *Aquinatis opera*, v.364; tr. O'Neill, iv.281. The point being stressed here is that contrition alone, however sincere, will not suffice for the operation of the sacrament of penance. This view came to be widely held; for example, while Albert the Great and the *Alexandri summa* accepted that contrition takes away mortal sin, they also believed that contrition involves a promise of confession. For Albert see *In IV Sent.*, dist. XVI–XVII; *Alberti opera*, xxix.559, 660, 666, 670, 700.

149. *Summa contra gentiles*, IV.72, 12, in *Aquinatis opera*, v.364; tr. O'Neill, iv.281.

150. Its editor describes it as "the definitive, though abridged form" of a reference book which "passed through a number of versions, the earliest and longest being the *Floretum* compiled at some time between 1384 and 1396." *Rosarium theologie*, ed. von Nolcken, p. 9.

151. *Rosarium theologie*, ed. von Nolcken, p. 55.

152. As Anne Hudson says, it would take a "hostile observer" to detect heterodoxy here; *Premature Reformation*, p. 107. One may contrast the polemical Lollard tract known as *Sixteen Points on which the Bishops accuse Lollards*, wherein "schrifte of moupe" is severely diminished: "very contricioun is þe essential parte of penance, and confecioun of moupe is þe accidental parte." *Selections from English Wycliffite Writings*, ed. Hudson, pp. 20–21. On similar statements in vernacular Lollard sermons see *English Wycliffite Sermons*, ed. Gradon and Hudson, iv.40–47. (This fourth volume gives a useful summary of issues addressed in the 294 sermons that form the cycle printed in the previous three volumes.)

153. *Rosarium*, ed. von Nolcken, p. 58.

154. *Fasciculi zizaniorum*, p. 278, cf. p. 494.

155. *Selections from English Wycliffite Writings*, ed. Hudson, p. 34. Cf. the ninth of the *Twelve Conclusions of the Lollards*, which accuses priests of enhancing their pride "with a feynid power of absoliucion" (p. 27).

156. *Fasciculi zaboriorum*, p. 502.

157. J. A. F. Thomson, *The Later Lollards, 1414–1520* (London, 1965), p. 183.

158. *Rosarium*, ed. von Nolcken, p. 55.

159. *In IV Sent.*, dist. XIX, qu. 1, art. 1, sol. 3; *Aquinatis opera*, vii.2.824–25.

160. *In IV Sent.*, dist. XIX, qu. 1, art. 1, sol. 3, ad 4um; *Aquinatis opera*, vii.2.825.

161. See in particular the treatment of this issue by Duns Scotus, mentioned on p. 15 above and discussed at more length in Chapter 3 below.

162. *In IV Sent.*, dist. XIX, qu. 1, art. 1, quaestiunc. 3, 2; *Aquinatis opera*, vii.2, 824. See also the *Alexandri summa*, pars IV, qu. 79, mem. 3, art. 1, resp. (316v).

163. *Summa contra gentiles*, IV.74. 6; tr. O'Neill, iv.287.

164. *Provinciale*, lib. V, tit. 16; *Provinciale seu constitutiones angliae* (Oxford, 1679, rpt. Hants., 1968), p. 336. Lyndwood is commenting on a constitution of the Lambeth Council of 1278.

165. Here we are talking about punishment and remission as imposed or achieved while the penitent was still alive. The matter of whether indulgences benefited the dead was controversial; Albert the Great and Thomas Aquinas accepted that this was the case under certain specific conditions, while Bonaventure believed they were invalid. However, Bonaventure was willing to accept indulgences for the dead if they were understood as suffrages, i.e., *prayers* for pardon rather than acts of jurisdiction, sure pardons as granted by ecclesiastical authority. See the excellent discussion by Robert W. Shaffern, “Learned Discussions of Indulgences for the Dead in the Middle Ages,” *Church History*, 61 (1992), 367–81. By Chaucer’s day, such worries had generally been forgotten, and the acquisition of indulgences was commonly regarded as an important means whereby, as Lionel Rothkrug puts it, a sinner’s friends and relations “could shorten, indeed sometimes entirely eliminate, the term of affliction preparatory to entering paradise” (p. 33). He regards “the popularization and progressively mortuary character of indulgences” as a crucial component of “a single vast movement that sought to democratize Europe’s penitential system,” thanks to which “common laymen” came to enjoy “a qualified power of remission.” On his argument, this enhancement of “the spiritual dignity of the common man” was achieved “only by making more intimate the relations between the living and the dead.” “Popular Religion and Holy Shrines,” in James Obelkevich (ed.), *Religion and the People, 800–1700* (Chapel Hill, N.C., 1979), pp. 20–86 (pp. 37–38). See further the relevant discussion in Bruce Gordon and Peter Marshall (eds.), *The Place of the Dead: Death and Remembrance in Late Medieval and Early Modern Europe* (Cambridge, 2000).

166. This will suffice as an initial definition; it will be subjected to many qualifications in the following discussion. Cf. Diana Webb, *Pilgrims and Pilgrimage in the Medieval West* (London, 1999), pp. 65, 117–19.

167. On this doctrine see especially Robert W. Shaffern, “Images, Jurisdiction, and the Treasury of Merit,” *Journal of Medieval History*, 22, no. 3 (1996), 237–47.

168. And was seen as having precedents in statements by St. Paul; cf. II Corinthians 11:10 and Colossians 1:24.

169. On the development of the theory and practice of indulgences in twelfth-century England see especially Nicholas Vincent, “Some Pardoners’ Tales: The Earliest English Indulgences,” *Transactions of the Royal Historical Society*, 12 (2002), 23–58, who argues for the influence of this contribution on thirteenth-century Parisian theology.

170. Cf. Shaffern, “Indulgences for the Dead.”

171. On which see, of course, the landmark study by Jacques Le Goff, *The Birth of Purgatory*, tr. Arthur Goldhammer (London, 1984).

172. Palmer, *Sacraments and Forgiveness*, p. 335.

173. Palmer, *Sacraments and Forgiveness*, p. 336.

174. In contrast to the partial and general indulgences, as discussed above.

175. Henry Charles Lea, *A History of Auricular Confession and Indulgences in the Latin Church* (1896, rpt. New York, 1968), iii.19.

176. The Jesuit scholar Paul F. Palmer goes so far as to claim that “many of the social gains which we associate today with European civilization are the direct or indirect result of the preaching of indulgences”: *Sacraments and Forgiveness*, p. 352. This point is reiterated and amplified in the article on “Indulgences” which Palmer and G. A. Tavadar contributed to the latest *New Catholic Encyclopedia*. Moving on to the “spiritual effects” of the system, they add: “Not only were the people reminded of their solidarity with the whole family of God which

the Church, triumphant as well as militant, but the preaching of an indulgence was often the occasion of spiritual revivals when preachers exhorted the faithful to true repentance and confession.” *New Catholic Encyclopedia*, 2nd ed., ed. B. L. Marthaler, G. F. LaNave, et al. (Detroit, 2003), vii.436–41.

177. A master of theology at Paris in 1312, Durandus lectured on the *Sentences* during the period 1307–8, but extensively rewrote his work later. The third redaction of the fourth book (dating from 1325–27) is the text which subsequently was printed, as in the edition which I have used. *In IV Sent.*, dist. XX, qu. 3, resp. (*In lib. Sent.*, fol. 353r).

178. Cf. Webb, *Pilgrims and Pilgrimage*, p. 76. On the forces of popular religious enthusiasm, wishful thinking and hearsay which induced and sustained this jubilee see Jonathan Sumption, *Pilgrimage: An Image of Medieval Religion* (Totowa, N.J., 1976), pp. 231–36.

179. Webb, *Pilgrims and Pilgrimage*, pp. 117, 118 (for both). Cf. the forged version of Clement VI’s bull *Unigenitus*, in Webb, *Pilgrims and Pilgrimage*, pp. 77–78.

180. *In IV Sent.*, dist. XXIV, qu. 2, art. 3 (ii.494–95). Baconthorpe concludes this discussion with the remark that Hostiensis “spoke badly” (*male dixit*) in stating that a simple priest can remit all satisfaction.

181. Letter T228/G278, to Neri di Landoccio Pagliaresi (1376), ed. N. Tommasèo and P. Misciattelli, *Lettere di S. Caterina da Siena* (Florence, 1939–47), iii.306;tr. Suzanne Noffke, *The Letters of Catherine of Siena*, vol. 2 (Tempe, Ariz., 2001), pp. 16–17. This may refer to the indulgence which Catherine had received from Gregory XI in the spring of 1374; cf. Noffke’s note (n. 21, pp. 16–17), which adds that we know from the *Leggenda minore* “that at some point Catherine received from Gregory XI an indulgence for the moment of death, an indulgence which was renewed by Urban VI.” Of course, in those circumstances also, the ministrations of a priest would have necessary to effect release *a culpa*. A plenary indulgence—no matter how distinguished the giver or the receiver—cannot on its own effect release *a pena et a culpa*.

182. “Non potest dare indulgentiam a pena et a culpa, quia culpa est materia repugnans indulgentie; non enim remittitur nisi per contritionem et confessionem”; “in foro iudiciali non potest absolvere a culpa, sed tantum in penitentiali.” Francis proceeds to defend the papal curia against the charge that it has issued indulgences *a pena et a culpa*. *In IV Sent.*, dist. XIX, qu. 3; *Franciscus de Mayronis, in libros sententiarum*, etc. (Venice, 1520; rpt. Frankfurt, 1966), fol. 207r.

183. For these citations, and further discussion of the issue, see Nikolaus Paulus, “Die Anfänge des sogenannten Ablasses von Schuld und Strafe,” *Zeitschrift für katholische Theologie* 36 (1912), 67–96 (especially pp. 93, 94).

184. *Sexti decretalium*, Lib. V, tit. ix: de poenitentiiis, cap. 2; *Corpus iuris canonici*, ed. Friedberg, ii.1190.

185. Lea, *Auricular Confession and Indulgences*, iii.63.

186. *Sacrorum conciliorum nova et amplissima collectio*, ed. Joannes Dominicus Mansi et al. (Paris, 1901–27), xxvii.689; cf. *Acta Concilii Constanciensis*, ed. Heinrich Finke et al. (Münster i. W., 1896–1928), iii.180–82.

187. Lea, *Auricular Confession and Indulgences*, iii.60.

188. Cf. Paulus, “Die Anfänge des sogenannten Ablasses von Schuld und Strafe.”

189. Lea, *Auricular Confession and Indulgences*, iii.66–67.

190. Wyclif, *Select English Works*, ed. Arnold, ii.417; see further *English Wycliffite Sermons*, ed. Graddon and Hudson, iv.47–49. These vernacular complaints may be traced back to ones made by Wyclif himself, in *De ecclesia*, ed. Loserth, pp. 549–87. Copiously quoting from the *Sentences* commentaries of Aquinas and Bonaventure, Wyclif expresses a long string of concerns. The present system implies that God sells righteousness, and that the pope has the power to remit sin without satisfaction (which not even God can do). In fact, the merits of Christ and his saints are theirs alone, and beyond our reach. The errors of the pope and his curia are compounded by those who forge their bulls. Furthermore, the pope is arrogating an extraordinary amount of power to himself, acting as the judge of all souls, including those in purgatory, heaven, and hell. But this power is God’s alone. The Almighty is perfectly capable of dispensing reward Himself, without the help of any pope—and besides, the pope cannot judge who is worthy in God’s sight (indeed, no human being can, without the aid of a revelation). This means that either papal indulgences take effect without worthiness in the recipient (a blasphemous suggestion) or the recipient benefits simply according to his

personal merit, a condition admitted in indulgences which note the importance of proper contrition, etc. (in which case the indulgence is superfluous, since it does not add anything to what the recipient has already gained). Then again, if the pope's power in such matters is infinite, why does he not use it to save all the souls he could, and restore the golden age? Wyclif's preference for righteous layfolk over corrupt clergymen surfaces when he argues that God may grant pardon following the petition of a layman, rather than in response to a prelate who blasphemously or sacrilegiously presumes to sell something he does not have. John Hus followed these arguments verbatim in his famous *quaestio de indulgentiis* of 1412. On Wycliffite views see now Anne Hudson, "Dangerous Fictions: Indulgences in the Thought of Wyclif and His Followers," in R. N. Swanson (ed.), *Promissory Notes on the Treasury of Merits: Indulgences in Late Medieval Europe* (Leiden, 2006), pp. 197–214. On Hussite views see the essay by Eva Doležalová, Jan Hrdina, František Šmahel, and Zdeněk Uhlíř, "The Reception and Criticism of Indulgences in the Late Medieval Czech Lands," also in Swanson (ed.), *Promissory Notes*, pp. 101–41 (esp. pp. 120–41).

191. Wyclif, *Select English Works*, ed. Arnold, i.136–37. See further *English Wycliffite Sermons*, ed. Gradon and Hudson, iv.146–51.

192. *De pontificum romanorum schismate*, vii, in Wyclif, *Select English Works*, ed. Arnold, iii.262.

193. Cf. Palmer, *Sacraments and Forgiveness*, pp. 354–55.

194. Here I follow the selection of theses relating to indulgences as published by Palmer, *Sacraments and Forgiveness*, p. 357. Cf. Kurt Aland, *Martin Luther's 95 Theses* (St. Louis, 1967), pp. 50–51, 52, 53, 54, 57, and 83; and see especially David Bagchi, "Luther's *Ninety-five Theses* and the Contemporary Criticism of Indulgences," in Swanson (ed.), *Promissory Notes*, pp. 331–55.

195. Aaland, *Luther's 95 Theses*, p. 57.

196. *In IV Sent.*, dist. XX, E, art. 17; *Alberti opera*, xxix.849.

197. *In IV Sent.*, dist. XX, E, art. 17, ad 7 and 8; *Alberti opera*, xxix.852.

198. *De sacramento ordinis*, xiii; *Opera omnia*, i.550–51.

199. Cf. Thomas of Chobham's interrogation of the phrase *pro questu* in his *quaestio* on whether a preacher sin mortally in preaching for alms; discussed on pp. 105–6 below.

200. *In IV Sent.*, dist. XX, qu. 1, art. 3, sol. 3; *Aquinatis opera*, vii.2.845.

201. *In IV Sent.*, dist. XX, E, art. 17, ad 6; *Alberti opera*, xxix.852.

202. Pars IV, qu. 83, mem. 3, resp. (132r).

203. *In IV Sent.*, dist. XX, E, art. 16, sol.; *Alberti opera*, xxix.848.

204. *In IV Sent.*, dist. XX, qu. 1, art. 3, sol. 1; *Aquinatis opera*, vii.2.843–44. Durandus of St. Pourçain remarks that the amount of merit available in the spiritual treasury is sufficient to afford satisfaction not only for the sins of our entire world but also for those of other worlds, should they exist. *In IV Sent.*, dist. XX, qu. 3, resp. (fol. 353r).

205. *Extravagantium communium*, v: de simonia, tit. ix, cap. 2; *Corpus iuris canonici*, ed. Friedberg, ii.1304.

206. *In IV Sent.*, dist. XX, E, art. 17, resp.; *Alberti opera*, xxix.850.

207. *In IV Sent.*, dist. XX, pars 2, art. un., qu. 4, resp.; *Bonaventurae opera*, iv.537.

208. *Alexandri summa*, pars IV, qu. 83, mem. 4 (132v–3r).

209. *Alexandri summa*, pars IV, qu. 83, mem. 8 (134r).

210. Quodl. 2, qu. 8, art. 2, resp.; *Quaestiones quodlibetales*, ed. R. Spiazzi, 8th ed. (Turin and Rome, 1949), p. 37; tr. S. Edwards, *St. Thomas Aquinas: Quodlibetal Questions 1 and 2* (Toronto, 1983), p. 113. See further R. Cessario, "St. Thomas Aquinas on Satisfaction, Indulgences, and Crusades," *Medieval Philosophy and Theology*, 2 (1992), 74–96.

211. *In Sent. IV*, dist. XX, pars 2, art. un., qu. 4, ad ob. 4; *Bonaventurae opera*, iv.537.

212. And Thomas Aquinas notes the fact that "sometimes the same indulgence is granted to those who preach a crusade as to those who take part in it": *In IV Sent.*, dist. XX, qu. 1, art. 3, sol., ad 2um; *Aquinatis opera*, vii.2.843.

213. Cf. Webb, *Pilgrims and Pilgrimage*, pp. 65–68, and Sumption, *Pilgrimage*, p. 241. See further Debra J. Birch, *Pilgrimage to Rome in the Middle Ages: Continuity and Change* (Woodbridge, 1998), pp. 142–43, 179–81, 194–96. Here, as in so many areas relating to indulgences, the rich and powerful inevitably received special treatment. See further B. Matray's statistics concerning the indulgence grants made by two popes to aristocrats and high-ranking churchmen; "Les Indulgences au XIV^e siècle: Étude des lettres de Jean XXII (1316–1334) et d'Urbain V (1363–1370)," *Cahiers de histoire*, 33, no. 2 (1988), 135–51.

214. Cf. Webb, *Pilgrims and Pilgrimage*, pp. 66, 77–78; Sumption, *Pilgrimage*, p. 240; and Wood, *Clement VI*, pp. 32–33.

215. "It were ydil to traveile for ony pardoun, siþ a man myȝte at home gete him fourty þousand þeer bi noone": Wyclif, *Select English Works*, ed. Arnold, i.137. This writer is referring to a provision allegedly made by Clement VII, at the request of the king of France, whereby in exchange for the saying of a specific prayer any contrite person was granted the relaxation of "two þousand þeer of indulgencis for þe payne of purgatorie. And so men nedden not to go to Rome to get hem plein indulgence, siþ a man mai gete here indulgence for many þousand þeer after domesday, siþ he may geten in half a day an hundrid þousend þeer and more. Bot who wolde travel þan so folily to þe Courte of Rome in perel, for to gete hem indulgences?" Here I quote from a fuller account of the same allegation, in Wyclif, *Select English Works*, ed. Arnold, ii.302.

216. Sumption, *Pilgrimage*, p. 292. The Roman jubilee indulgence of 1390 was widely available *ad instar*. In 1392 Boniface IX began to grant the Portiuncula indulgence to other institutions across Europe; some forty churches in England benefited (p. 292).

217. *In IV Sent.*, dist. XX, E, art. 17, sed contra, 3; *Alberti opera*, xxix.850. Cf. *Alexandri summa*, pars IV, qu. 83, mem. 1, art. 1 (130v).

218. *In IV Sent.*, dist. XX, qu. 1, art. 3, sed contra and sol. 1; *Aquinatis opera*, vii.2.843–44.

219. *In IV Sent.*, dist. XX, art. un., qu. 2; *Bonaventurae opera*, iv.533.

220. Pars IV, qu. 83, mem. 1, art. 1, resp. (131r). Cf. also Aquinas, *In IV Sent.*, dist. XX, qu. 1, art. 3, sol. 1; *Aquinatis opera*, vii.2.843–44.

221. *In IV Sent.*, dist. XX, E, art. 17, resp.; *Alberti opera*, xxix.850.

222. *In IV Sent.*, dist. XX, qu. 1, art. 3, sol. 2; *Aquinatis opera*, vii.2.844. Wyclif quotes Aquinas's dismissal of the implications of the "mother's promise" *exemplum* (as I propose to

call it) but argues that the saint proceeds to get involved in an argument he cannot win, when he claims that the value of indulgences depends on the amount of merit applied to them. The fact of the matter, responds Wyclif, is that different values seem to be assigned to indulgences in an arbitrary and unjustifiable manner, and general indulgences are particularly problematic, inasmuch as they lump everyone together without any account being taken of individual merit. *De ecclesia*, ed. Loserth, pp. 579–81.

223. The “mother’s promise” *exemplum* features in a particularly interesting way in the *Sentences* commentary of Thomas of Strasbourg, O.E.S.A. (c. 1275–c. 1357), who says that if indulgences are not worth what they’re said to be this could not even be dignified with the name of “pious fraud.” Rather it would be cruel and impious, because a man would greatly be deceived thereby, being obliged to endure most severe punishment which he believed had been absolved. *In IV Sent.*, dist. XX, qu. 1, art. 4, sol., response to op. 3; *Thomas ab Argentina, Commentaria in IIII libros sententiarum* (Venice, 1564, rpt. Ridgewood, N.J., 1965), fol. 130v. A master of theology at Paris in 1337, Thomas composed his *Sentences* commentary there c. 1335/37.

224. *In IV Sent.*, dist. XX, pars 2, art. un., qu. 6; *Bonaventurae opera*, iv.539–41.

225. Cf. Lea, *Auricular Confession and Indulgences*, p. 52.

226. *In IV Sent.*, dist. XX, qu. 1, art. 3, quaestiunc. 2, sol.; *Aquinatis opera*, vii.2.844–45.

227. William of Auvergne, *De sacramento ordinis*, xiii; *Opera omnia*, i.550–51; Peter of Tarantasia, *In IV Sent.*, dist. XX, qu. 3, art. 3 (iv.232–33).

228. This standard *quaestio* seems to be echoed in one of the accusations brought against the Lollard William Swinderby in 1390, viz. that he had taught that “indulgens ben noght so myche worth, as thai sonnen and ben presched,” since the years “contenet in his [the pope’s] bulles” are far in excess of the number of years existing between now and the day of judgment. John Trefnant, *Registrum*, ed. Capes, p. 247.

229. *Aquinatis opera*, vii.2.845.

230. *In IV Sent.*, dist. XX, qu. 4, art. 1, concl. 3 (p. 267).

231. *In IV Sent.*, dist. XX, qu. 1, art. 3, sol. 2, ad 4um; *Aquinatis opera*, vii.2.845. On the *toties-quoties* indulgences obtainable c. 1450 in the Roman churches of Saints Peter and Paul see John Capgrave’s eyewitness account: *Ye Solace of Pilgrimes. A Description of Rome circa A.D. 1450*, ed. C. A. Mills (Oxford, 1911), pp. 62–63, 67. This type of indulgence is discussed by Sumption, *Pilgrimage*, pp. 294–95.

232. *Birgitta of Sweden: Life and Selected Revelations*, tr. A. R. Kezel (New York, 1990), p. 92.

233. *Provinciale*, lib. III, tit. 23; pp. 231–32. A brief discussion of this passage may be found in Margaret Harvey, *England, Rome and the Papacy, 1417–1464* (Manchester, 1993), p. 237.

234. *Alexandri summa*, pars IV, qu. 83, mem. 1, art. 2, resp. (131v). Bonaventure, *In IV Sent.*, dist. XX, pars 2, art. un., qu. 1, resp.; *Bonaventurae opera*, iv.530–31.

235. *Quodl.* 2, qu. 8, art. 2, resp., ad 3um, ed. Spiazzi, p. 37; tr. Edwards, p. 113.

236. *In IV Sent.*, dist. XX, qu. 1, art. 5, sol. 1; *Aquinatis opera*, vii.2.847.

237. *Alexandri summa*, pars IV, qu. 83, art. 2, mem. 3 (131r).

238. *In IV Sent.*, dist. XX, E, art. 22; *Alberti opera*, xxii.858–59.

239. *In IV Sent.*, dist. XX, qu. 1, art. 3, sol. 1; *Aquinatis opera*, vii.2.846. The issue of who has the authority to grant indulgences—popes, prelates, religious institutions—is one of the many topics debated with great clarity in the treatise *De quantitate indulgenciarum* of John of Dambach, O.P., probably written while John was professor of theology at the newly founded University of Prague (i.e., during the period 1347–50). See Robert W. Shaffern, “A New Canonistic Text on Indulgences: *De quantitate indulgenciarum* of John of Dambach, O.P. (1288–1372),” *Bulletin of Medieval Canon Law*, n.s. 21 (1991), 25–45.

240. *In IV Sent.*, dist. XX, qu. 1, art. 3, sol. 1; *Aquinatis opera*, vii.2.846.

241. *Quodl.* 2, qu. 8, art. 2, resp., ad 2um, ed. Spiazzi, p. 37; tr. Edwards, p. 113.

242. *In IV Sent.*, dist. XX, E, art. 20; *Alberti opera*, xxix.856–57.

243. Aquinas’s version of this *quaestio* is, “whether indulgences can be granted by one in moral sin?” *In IV Sent.*, dist. XX, qu. 1, art. 4, quaestiunc. 4 and sol. 4; *Aquinatis opera*, vii.2.846.

244. *Aquinatis opera*, vii.2.846.

245. The origins of “Richardus de Mediavilla” are unknown; he was either French or English. *Magister regens* at Paris c. 1284–87, Richard served within the household of Louis of

Anjou, Bishop of Toulouse, around 1296.

246. In *IV Sent.*, dist. XX, art. 5, qu. 1; *Super quatuor libros sententiarum* (Brescia, 1591), iv.331. What is crucial, Richard continues, is the reason for the indulgence: if anyone, whether good or bad, tries to make a grant from the spiritual treasury against the divine intention, then this dispensation is null and void.

247. In *IV Sent.*, dist. XX, art. 4, secunda conclusio, ad 2um (fol. 131r).

248. In *IV Sent.*, dist. XX, art. 3, secunda conclusio, solutio (fol. 136v).

249. In *IV Sent.*, dist. XX, art. 4, qu. 1 (iv.330–31). However, Richard explains, if a person living in mortal sin does what is contained in the *forma indulgentiae*, he is acting prudently, because good deeds performed while in mortal sin, in a certain manner of speaking, dispose the sinner *de congruo* toward penance and by that means to receiving some remission of sin by divine mercy. In other words, congruent or “inferior” merit (on which see p. 419n below) may perhaps be earned through good deeds—specifically, in this case, those required by the form of the indulgence—done while in mortal sin.

250. Competition was fierce: as Ben Nilson says, “It was more difficult to obtain indulgences [from the pope] as a shrine aged, partly because the shrine lost novelty value but also because new competitors for indulgences were always springing up.” *Cathedral Shrines of Medieval England* (Woodbridge, 1998), p. 179. New institutions could experience difficulty also, a good example being afforded by St. Bridget of Sweden’s arduous efforts to gain the greatest possible indulgence for her convent in Vadstena—despite her having received a vision in which Christ Himself had declared that Urban V should sanction it. See *St. Bridget’s Revelations to the Popes: An Edition of the So-Called “Tractatus de summis pontificibus,”* ed. Arne Jönsson (Lund, 1997), p. 44; cf. Aron Andersson, *Saint Bridget of Sweden* (London, 1980), pp. 99–100.

251. The previous Canterbury jubilee years were 1220, 1270, 1320, and 1370.

252. This treatise has been edited by Raymonde Foreville, *Le Jubilé de Saint Thomas Becket du XIII^e au XV^e siècle (1220–1470): Études et documents* (Paris, 1958), pp. 115–60. Foreville discusses the issue of authorship on pp. 109–13. Godmersham, a canon lawyer, was appointed head of Canterbury College by Thomas Arundel in 1403.

253. The Church of St. Mary of the Portiuncula was a small chapel near Assisi which had been made over to the use of St. Francis and his followers; the saint died there in 1226. In his *vita* St. Bonaventure says that Francis loved it “before all other places in the world; for here he began in humility, here he made progress in virtue, here he ended in happiness, and, dying, commended it unto the Brethren as a place most beloved of the Virgin.” Tr. E. G. Salter in *The Little Flowers of St. Francis, The Mirror of Perfection, and St. Bonaventure’s Life of St. Francis* (London, 1910, rpt. 1966), p. 315.

254. None of the oldest legends of St. Francis mentions the indulgence. In a notary’s deed of 31 October 1277, Benedict of Arezzo, whom St. Francis himself had received into the order, testifies that he had been informed by Brother Masseo, a companion of St. Francis, of the granting of the indulgence by Pope Honorius III at Perugia. An expanded account of the crucial meeting with the Pope which was written in 1310 by Bishop Teobald of Assisi offers either a plausible or a suspiciously convenient explanation (depending on one’s point of view) of the lack of original documentation. The Saint rejects Honorius’s offer of written proof of the grant, declaring, “Your word alone suffices. If it is God’s work, it is for him to manifest his own work. Concerning this I desire no other document, but let the Blessed Virgin Mary alone be my charter, Christ my notary, and the angels my witness.” Tr. in John Shinnars (ed.), *Medieval Popular Religion, 1000–1500: A Reader* (Peterborough, Ont., 1997), pp. 382–83; cf. Raphael M. Huber, *The Portiuncula Indulgence, from Honorius III to Pius XI*, Franciscan Studies 19 (New York, 1938), pp. 6–10. Early testimonies were collected by the Franciscan friar Francesco della Rossa Bartholi, and included in his *Tractatus de indulgentia S. Mariae de Portiuncula* (c. 1335). Francesco also provides many “customer satisfaction” testimonies, from blessed souls who return in visions to vouch for the indulgence’s efficacy in helping them through purgatory. This treatise has been edited by Paul Sabatier (Paris, 1900). The authenticity of the original grant was also defended by Peter John Olivi in a *quaestio* which has been dated to the period 1279–85: for discussion and an edition see Pierre Péano, “La ‘quaestio fr. Petri Iohannis Olivi’ sur l’indulgence de la Portiuncule,” *Archivum Franciscanum Historicum*, 74 (1981), 33–76. Following the framework of the rhetorical *circumstantiae*, Olivi affirms the indulgence’s authenticity with regard to the great dignity of the person who procured it (St. Francis himself) and the excellent place, manner,

time, and usefulness of its procurement, together with the sublimity of the evangelical state which it manifest, the evidence of worthy testimonies in its favor, and the grand largesse of its donor, the Sovereign Pontiff. However, anxieties persisted. St. Bridget of Sweden had to be reassured by Christ Himself that the Portiuncula indulgence was genuine. Cf. Diana Webb, *Medieval European Pilgrimage*, 700–c. 1500 (Houndmills, Basingstoke, 2002), p. 69.

255. Here I discuss the fourth part of the treatise, in which a full theological defense of the Canterbury plenary indulgence is offered; *Traité sur le cinquième jubilé*, ed. Foreville, pp. 147–55.

256. *In IV Sent.*, dist. XX, qu.1, art. 3, sol. 2; *Aquinatis opera*, vii.2.844–45.

257. *Traité*, ed. Foreville, pp. 150–51; previously quoted on p. 132. On the Pontigny vision see William FitzStephen, *Vita Sancti Thomae* (76), in *Materials for the History of Thomas Becket*, ed. J. C. Robertson, Rolls Series, 67 (London, 1876), iii.83. Godmersham also quotes to the same end a similar passage from another life of Becket, by Herbert of Bosham: “O Thomas, how much glory I have given to Peter the prince of apostles, I will not give less to thee.” *Traité*, p. 132; cf. *Materials*, iii.515. On the lives of Becket see especially Jennifer M. Lee, “Searching for Signs: Pilgrims’ Identity and Experience Made Visible in the *Miracula Sancti Thomae Cantuariensis*,” in Sarah Blick and Rita Tekippe (eds.), *Art and Architecture of Late Medieval Pilgrimage in Northern Europe and the British Isles* (Leiden, 2005), pp. 473–91.

258. Here Godmersham, as he himself explains, is interpreting Christ’s words to Becket according to mystical and spiritual understanding—in other words, this statement is worthy of the prestigious hermeneutic scrutiny which traditionally is afforded to Holy Writ.

259. On Lollard mockery of pilgrimage to Canterbury see our relevant discussion in Chapter 4 below.

260. *Traité*, ed. Foreville, p. 119. It is admitted, however, that “difficult questions and opinions” concerning the plenary indulgence have also arisen many years before this present jubilee from “those who are of tried worth, that is, of proven splendour of thought.”

261. See the graphs printed by Nilson, *Cathedral Shrines*, p. 234, and also his discussion on pp. 147–54. The picture of decline painted in some recent accounts is dubious, to say the least. Nilson’s judicious account stresses the incompleteness of the evidence and the difficulties incumbent on its interpretation. While it is true that the priors’ rolls indicate a drastic drop in offerings in the early fifteenth century (the 1420 jubilee year being atypical), the single surviving feretrarians’ account of 1398/9 and the “Customary of the Shrine of St. Thomas” suggest that “offerings were considerable in the late fourteenth and early fifteenth centuries” (pp. 150–51). “It seems clear,” Nilson concludes, “that a great deal of the shrine income was not reaching the prior’s accounts in the fifteenth century” (p. 152); this accounting technicality should certainly not be taken as evidence of decline. Speaking more generally of shrine offerings, he suggests that “the point of highest offerings was roughly contemporary with the writing of *The Canterbury Tales* in the 1380s” (p. 180). By contrast, the account given by Sumption, *Pilgrimage*, pp. 150–53, is unclear and in some ways misleading—not least the strange remark that the jubilee indulgence of 1370 brought “the poet Chaucer” to Canterbury.

262. Cf. R. N. Swanson, *Church and Society in Late Medieval England* (Oxford, 1989), pp. 292–94.

263. There are two editions: by F. Stegmüller, *Annali della biblioteca governativa et libraria civica di Cremona*, Monumenta Cremonensia II (Cremona, 1955), pp. 1–17, and D. Trapp, “The Portiuncula Discussion of Cremona (ca. 1380),” *RTAM* 22 (1955), 79–94. Trapp’s title is somewhat misleading, given that what is at issue are the indulgences claimed by the Church of St. John of the Desert near Cremona; however, the Assisi Portiuncula indulgence certainly is brought into the discussion. The *Disputationes de indulgentiis* takes the form of a record of three disputations, written very much from Simon’s point of view: 1. in Cremona Cathedral, involving the Dominican Fr. Leonard (acting as *respondens*), the Franciscan Bartholomew of Mainard, and the Carmelite Master Dominic. The question was *Utrum absolutus a culpa et paena statim evolet ad caelestia regna*. 2. probably in the Franciscan monastery at Cremona; here the Franciscan Master John had disputed “for many days” the question *Utrum religiosi a paena et culpa absolventes excommunicationis sententiam sint simpliciter incurrentes*. 3. In the Augustinian monastery at Cremona, involving Bartholomew of Mainard and the Augustinian John of Novaria. The question was *Utrum absolutus a culpa et paena statim evolet ad caelestia regna*. This seems to have been a particularly lively affair: Bartholomew, interrogated by many on the issue of whether his order actually had the

requisite papal privilege for the Portiuncula indulgence, was reduced to silence, at which point the debate broke up in disarray, with the “agitated” Master John rising from his seat and leaving.

264. Cf. *Clementinarum liber V*, tit. 7 de privilegiis, c. 1 *Religiosi*, in *Corpus iuris canonici*, ed. Friedberg, ii.1186–87.

265. My discussion here is confined to the first of the *Disputationes de indulgentiis*, ed. Stegmüller, pp. 10–13; ed. Trapp, pp. 86–90.

266. Benedict of Arezzo’s account of the crucial meeting between Francis and Pope Honorius (cf. n. 254 above) does not include the phrase *a pena et a culpa* in its description of the indulgence; on the contrary, this document emphasizes the importance of contrition and confession: see Francesco della Rossa Bartholi, *Tractatus de indulgentia S. Mariae de Portiuncula*, ed. Sabatier, p. xlv. The importance of the priest’s role is maintained in Teobald of Assisi’s account (1310), but there is a crucial amplification: St. Francis expresses his wish “that all those who come to that church contrite and confessed, and duly absolved by a priest, shall be absolved from punishment and blame (*a poena et at culpa*) in heaven and on earth, from the day of their baptism to the day and hour of their entrance into the aforesaid church.” This careful statement would probably have satisfied even Simon of Cremona, but the form of words indicates all too clearly how ambiguity and confusion could arise. Cf. Shinnars, *Medieval Popular Religion*, p. 383; Huber, *The Portiuncula Indulgence*, p. 7. See further the testimony of Olivi’s *quaestio* in defense of the Portiuncula indulgence: one of the two manuscripts used in Péano’s edition speaks of it as an indulgence *ab omni culpa et peccato*; in the other *pena* is substituted for *peccato*. “La ‘quaestio’ sur l’indulgence,” p. 64.

267. Quoted and discussed in Lyndwood’s *Provinciale*, v. tit. 16 (p. 336). Cf. the highly revealing insight into the turf wars of competing jurisdictions afforded by John of Dambach’s *De quantitate indulgentiarum*, as discussed by Shaffern, “New Canonistic Text,” esp. pp. 26–37. John’s vested interest is in defending Dominican collective indulgences. This involved maintaining the right of licensed bishops to grant indulgences to persons outside their jurisdiction, one of his main arguments being that each and every pilgrim should receive the same benefit from a collective visitation indulgence, even if his or her bishop was not one of the “lawful judges” involved in its proclamation.

268. And Lyndwood, like Aquinas before him (cf. p. 86 above), knew that wording was crucially important, and that different types of pardons offered very different rewards. For instance, the highly popular *toties-quoties* indulgences could be gained as often as one visited the church and/or shrine in question.

269. *Provinciale*, v. tit. 16 (p. 336).

CHAPTER 2. MORAL FALLIBILITY

1. All *Roman de la Rose* references are to the edition by Félix Lecoy (Paris, 1965–70). Here, and in Chapter 4 below, I draw on the translations of the *Rose* by Charles Dahlberg (Hanover, N.H., 1971, rpt. 1983) and Frances Horgan (Oxford, 1994).

2. For materials relating to the Pardoner’s authority *qua* pardoner, or the lack thereof, see especially J. J. Jusserand, “Chaucer’s Pardoner and the Pope’s Pardoners,” *Chaucer Society Essays*, 13, pt. 5 (1889), 423–36; Owst, *Preaching in Medieval England*, pp. 99–101; A. L. Kellogg and L. A. Haselmayer, “Chaucer’s Satire of the Pardoner,” *PMLA*, 66 (1951), 251–77, reprinted in Alfred L. Kellogg, *Chaucer, Langland, Arthur: Essays in Middle English Literature* (New Brunswick, 1972), pp. 212–44 (this being the version I cite below); and Arnold Williams, “Some Documents on English Pardoners, 1350–1400,” in John Maloney and J. E. Keller (eds.), *Mediaeval Studies in Honor of U. T. Holmes* (Chapel Hill, N.C., 1965), pp. 197–207.

3. The Tudor dramatist John Heywood (c. 1497–c. 1580) wrote two plays which feature pardoners, the one quoted here, viz. *The Mery Play between the Pardoner and the Frere*, and another, *The Play called the Foure PP: A Newe and a Very Mery Interlude of a Palmer, a Pardoner, a Potycary, a Pedler*, on which we shall draw later in this chapter. Both have been edited by Richard Axton and Peter Happé in *The Plays of John Heywood* (Cambridge, 1991), on pp. 94–109 and 112–42, respectively.

4. More work into the royal licensing of *quaestores* is needed. In the case of collections for the new shrine of St. Thomas Cantilupe, we know that certain “official appointees. . . received royal letters of credence from Edward II, ordering royal officials to give them

protection and support as they toured the country"; R. N. Swanson, "Contributions from Parishes in the Archdeaconry of Norfolk to the Shrine of St Thomas Cantilupe at Hereford, ca. 1320," *MS 62* (2000), 189–218 (pp. 195–96). Such practice seems to have been quite widespread; cf. P. Héliot and M. L. Chastang, "Quêtes et voyages de reliques au profit des églises françaises du moyen âge" [pt. 2], *Revue d'histoire ecclésiastique*, 60 (1965), 5–32 (pp. 6–7, 29–30).

5. I am most grateful to R. N. Swanson for valuable discussion of this issue, and many others in the present chapter.

6. According to John Capgrave (following a late tradition), the original was a cloth on which "Crist wipt his face whan he went to his passioun." Wishing to have Christ's likeness depicted, Martha was en route to a painter when Christ met her—and imprinted on her "kerchy" the image of his face which was disfigured by his labor in preaching and fasting "and opir hardnesse." *Ye Solace of Pilgrimes*, ed. Mills, p. 64. Capgrave names Gervase of Tilbury as a source; cf. *Gervase of Tilbury, Otia imperialia*, ed. and tr. S. E. Banks and J. W. Binns (Oxford, 2002), pp. 604–7. See further James F. Rhodes, "The Pardoner's *Vernycle* and His *Vera Icon*," *Modern Language Studies*, 12 (1982), 34–40; and Flora Lewis, "The Veronica: Image, Legend and Viewer," in W. M. Ormrod (ed.), *England in the Thirteenth Century: Proceedings of the 1984 Harlaxton Symposium* (Woodbridge, 1985), pp. 100–106.

7. Cf. R. N. Swanson's studies, "Letters of Confraternity and Indulgence in Late Medieval England," *Archives: The Journal of the British Records Association*, 25, no. 102 (2000), 40–57, and "Treasuring Merit/Craving Indulgence: Accounting for Salvation in Pre-Reformation England," Inaugural Lecture, University of Birmingham (Birmingham, 2003), p. 6. Hence, the collective indulgence would offer release from temporal punishment or *poena*, as per usual for an indulgence, while the chosen confessor would absolve from guilt or *culpa*. On the confraternity as a "major institution in the cult of purgatory" see especially Lionel Rothkrug, "Popular Religion and Holy Shrines," pp. 33ff. "The two institutions, pilgrimage and confraternity, symbolized a single form of devotion in which groups of people, seeking to establish collective security on earth and in heaven through ritual acts, formed corporate 'families' or 'artificial kinship groups,' composed of living and dead members, each bound by some local pattern of ritual and confraternal bonds" (p. 34). Martin Luther would protest that confraternities had "appropriated the priestly power to grant dispensations and indulgences" (p. 84).

8. The fullest account known to me of how *individual* (as opposed to *collective*) indulgences could be doled out is located in an Italian source, a complaint addressed to Pope Eugenius IV in 1431 by the secular government of Florence, which may have been penned by Leonardi Bruni. This recounts how a knight of the Order of St. John of Jerusalem (on which see note 70 below) had recently visited the city, accompanied by an eloquent Franciscan friar who preached the plenary indulgence which, he declared, the knight had the power to grant. With them came a large number of letter-writers (*scriptores litterarum*), who sat on benches which had been placed in various churches, producing multiple copies of the pardon, "impressing their seals wholesale," and selling these products "indiscriminately to all comers." Cf. Gordon Griffiths, "Leonardi Bruni and the 1431 Florentine Complaint against Indulgence-Hawkers: A Case Study in Anticlericalism," in Peter A. Dykema and Heiko A. Oberman (eds.), *Anticlericalism in Late Medieval and Early Modern Europe* (Leiden, 1994), pp. 133–43 (pp. 137–39).

9. Cf. the *Summoner's Tale*, wherein the companion of the avaricious friar who is the butt of this satire writes the names of donors, "alle folk that yaf hym any good," on "a peyre of tables." But subsequently their names are erased—thus the friar serves his benefactors with "nyfles and with fables," i.e., with trifles and falsehoods (III(D) 1740–60).

10. Text consulted online in the Chadwyck-Healey *English Poetry Full-Text Database* (1992). The punctuation is my own.

11. Canon 62; tr. Shinnars, *Medieval Popular Religion*, p. 11. This is a major theme in episcopal and archiepiscopal documents relating to the policing of pardoners; see the instances published by Williams, "Documents on English Pardoners," pp. 201, 203, and cf. the *Memoriale presbiterorum*, iii.43: "Certain of them are true messengers (*nuncii*) of the places from which they are sent, and they have true letters, both apostolic [= papal] and of other authorized people, containing sure and true indulgences. . . But some *que-stores* are utterly false. . . They pretend that they have such letters. . . , containing indulgences, which are absolutely false, both in their text and in their seals (*tam in dictamine quam in sigillis*)."

Cambridge, Corpus Christi College, MS 148, fol. 77v. (This treatise dates from the mid-fourteenth century, and has a connection with Norwich Cathedral Priory.) On other occasions the documents themselves were quite genuine, but misrepresented by their unscrupulous possessors. For example, the 1431 Florentine complaint (on which see note 8 above) draws such a conclusion about the letters and seals which had been displayed by the knight of St. John and his companion the “loud and noisy” friar-preacher. When these documents were “carefully read and examined,” the civic investigators “found what we had previously suspected: that the limited and restrained authorizations that this knight had obtained from the Apostolic See, were being transformed, through the mouth of this venal and mercenary preacher, into promises that were unlimited and unbelievable.” Ed. Griffiths, “Bruni and the 1431 Florentine Complaint,” pp. 137, 139.

12. However, even the most prestigious seals could be forged. Thomas de Brantingham, Bishop of Exeter, complains about pardoners who, “equipped with false and forged letters bearing seals, both from the Apostolic See and from us (as the liars assert),” grant “indulgences to the people on their own authority,” among other abuses. This document may date from 1377; cf. the similar statement in a letter of 1384/85: *The Register of Brantingham, Bishop of Exeter*, ed. F. C. Hingeston-Randolph, 2 parts (London, 1901–6), pp. 380, 567–68. Cf. Williams, “Documents on English Pardoners,” pp. 202, 203; and Jusserand, “Chaucer’s Pardoner and the Pope’s,” pp. 425–26. It is intriguing—indeed ironic—to note that even if Chaucer’s Pardoner was an authentic *quaestor* working for the Rouncival hospital, his pardons almost certainly were based on a forged papal bull; see David K. Maxfield, “St. Mary Rouncivale, Charing Cross: The Hospital of Chaucer’s Pardoner,” *ChR* 28 (1993), 148–63. But of course, “he” could not possibly have known that, and neither could his inventor, Geoffrey Chaucer.

13. Cf. J. M. Manly, *Some New Light on Chaucer* (London, 1926), pp. 124–30; Samuel Moore, “Chaucer’s Pardoner of Rouncival,” *MP* 25 (1927/28), 59–66 (pp. 65–66); Kellogg, “Chaucer’s Satire of the Pardoner,” p. 227; Maxfield, “St. Mary Rouncivale,” pp. 153–54, 157–59.

14. See the final section of this chapter.

15. Cf. the relevant remarks in our previous chapter, particularly on pp. 75, 380n.

16. *In IV Sent.*, dist. XX, pars 2, art. un., qu. 1 (*Bonaventurae opera*, iv.530–31).

17. Cf. the complaint in the Lollard treatise *The Office of Curates* about how unscrupulous pardoners “drawe þe almes fro pore bedrede neiȝeboris þat ben knownen feble & pore, & to get it to hem self & wasten it ful synfulli in ydelnesse & glotonye & lecherie” (Wyclif, *English Works*, ed. Matthew, p. 154).

18. *De eruditione praedicatorum*, i, ed. Berthier, *Humberti opera*, ii, 384; tr. Tugwell, pp. 194–95.

19. Cf. Gregory, *Hom. In Evang.*, lib. i, hom. 17; *PL* 76, col. 1140D.

20. Chobham, *Summa praedicandi*, p. 54.

21. Canon 62; tr. Shinnars, *Medieval Popular Religion*, p. 11.

22. *Summa de poenitentia et matrimonio, cum glossis Joannis de Friburgo*, De casibus poenitentiae, lib. III, tit. 34, 65 (Rome, 1603), pp. 497–98.

23. An “alestake” was a tavern sign consisting of a stake or pole, perhaps hung with a garland or some similar decoration. Cf. *MED*, s.v. *ale*, 4 (combs.) and *OED*, s.v. *alestake*.

24. The priest or prelate who loves the tavern more than the church is something of a theme in the preacher’s aids and handbooks: for an excellent example, see John Mirk’s *Manuale sacerdotis*, i. 14, in MS Bodley 549, 133v–4v. It is found often in Lollard literature: for examples, see Wyclif, *English Works*, ed. Matthew, pp. 23, 152, 168; cf. pp. 193, 217. And cf. below, pp. 131–32, 137–38.

25. Chobham, *Summa praedicandi*, pp. 59–61.

26. Cf. the application of this *auctoritas* by Henry of Ghent, described on pp. 46–47 above.

27. On this specific point, see further pp. 126–28 below.

28. On the sense of “temporal” here see the discussion in our previous chapter, p. 74.

29. *Registrum Johannis de Trillek*, ed. J. H. Parry, Canterbury and York Series, 8 (London: Canterbury and York Society, 1912), pp. 143–44. Cf. Diana Webb, *Pilgrimage in Medieval England* (London, 2000), p. 95.

30. *In IV Sent.*, dist. XX, qu. 1, art. 5, sol. 1; *Aquinas opera*, vii.2.847.

31. It is unclear how pardoners derived their own income, e.g., whether they received a flat fee or a percentage of the collection. R. N. Swanson cites an English example from the

early sixteenth century of a pardoner working on a commission basis: "Contributions from Parishers," p. 196. Money certainly was made from "subcontracting," as when a pardoner farmed out portions of his territory to subcollectors.

32. As Albert the Great says, pardons function through *gratia gratis data*, which is a matter of divine power, not of goodness of human life, and all such gifts of grace flow equally well through good and bad men (cf. p. 89 above). Hence the authorized originator of an indulgence, the man with the requisite jurisdiction, had no *personal* moral participation in the process.

33. *Utrum quilibet laicus iustus sit sacerdos noue legis*; Harley 31, fol. 216r. See further our discussion of Brut's theology in Chapter 3.

34. *King Arthur's Death*, ed. Larry D. Benson (Indianapolis, 1974), p. 214.

35. This discussion is included in Bersuire's moral dictionary for preachers, *Dictionarius seu Repertorium morale* (Venice, 1583), p. 27 (s.v. *absolvere, absolutio*). "Est igitur absolutio temporalis, que sit in foro iudiciali. Et absolutio spiritualis, que sit in foro pœnitentiali."

36. *Provinciale*, lib. III, tit. 23 (pp. 231–32); cf. the idiom of Clement VI's bull *Unigenitus*, as quoted on pp. 80–81 above.

37. *The Oxford Dictionary of the Christian Church*, ed. F. L. Cross and E. A. Livingstone, 3rd ed. (Oxford, 1997), p. 7. A clear example of this sense is afforded by the passage in *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight* which describes how Gawain privately approaches a priest, calling on him for "absolucioun"; "And he asoyled him surely and sette hym so clene / As domesday schulde haf ben dight on the morn" (1884–85). These quotations are from *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight*, Pearl, Cleanness, Patience, ed. J. J. Anderson (London, 1996).

38. *The Pricke of Conscience*, ed. Richard Morris (Berlin, 1863), p. 104.

39. *Provinciale*, lib V, tit. 16 (p. 336).

40. It must be admitted, of course, that such confusion may have been endemic, it being all too easy to blur the *absolutio* one received from a priest (empowered by the key of ministry) with the *relaxatio* one received from the legally authorized maker of an indulgence (empowered by the key of jurisdiction), especially since priestly *absolutio* was in a close relationship with judicial *relaxatio*—supposed to precede it, according to the best late-medieval theology on the subject.

41. Williams, "Documents on English Pardoners," pp. 200, 202. The English Carmelite John Baconthorpe includes absolution from vows, perjuries, and murders in his list of the abuses perpetrated by *quaestores*; he seems to envisage these sins as having been *confessed* to pardoners ("sibi confitentes absolvant"); *In IV Sent.*, dist. XXIV, qu. 1, art. 3 (ii.492). Heywood's pardoner-figure in *The Pardoner and the Frere* goes even further, offering "clene remysyon" and forgiveness "of the sinnes seven" without the need of "confessyon or contrycyon" (321–25). "Pardons for every cryme may dyspens!" (381). There is "no syn so abhomyable" which "to remyt" his "pardon is not able" (397, 399), including the slaying of "bothe father and mother" and all one's "kyndred" (381–85, 391–95).

42. Cf. Jusserand, "Chaucer's Pardoner and the Pope's," pp. 431–34; Owst, *Preaching in Medieval England*, pp. 104–5; Muriel Bowden, *A Commentary on the General Prologue to the "Canterbury Tales"* (New York, 1962), p. 281. See further the relevant statements in the registers of Bishops John de Grandisson and Thomas de Brantingham, quoted by Williams, "Documents on English Pardoners," pp. 200, 202.

43. Walsingham, *Historia anglicana*, ed. Riley, ii.79–80.

44. *Henrici Knighton Chronicon*, ed. J. R. Lumby (London, 1895, rpt. 1965), ii.199.

45. *Select English Works*, ed. Arnold, i.210.

46. For the argument that Langland uses the phrase *a pena et a culpa* without irony or implying that the phrase is dubious in itself, see my article "Piers' Protean Pardon: The Letter and Spirit of Langland's Theology of Indulgences," in Anne Marie D'Arcy and Alan J. Fletcher (eds.), *Studies in Late Medieval and Early Renaissance Texts in Honour of John Scattergood* (Dublin, 2005), pp. 218–40. No doubt Langland had heard the phrase *a pena et a culpa* commonly used, by learned and lewd alike, in connection with at least some indulgences.

47. Cf. pp. 75–76 above. Furthermore, sometimes it is spelled out that pardoners should be offering neither plenary remission nor absolution from punishment and guilt, as in the so-called *Apology for Lollard Doctrines*, where it says they "ow not to. . . graunt pleyn remissioun of synnis, ne asoile a pena et a culpa"; *An Apology for Lollard Doctrines attributed to Wicliffe*, ed. J. H. Todd, Camden Society 20 (London, 1842), p. 9. With this may be compared a comment of Bishop Brantingham of Exeter, specifically concerning fake and unlicensed pardoners, to

the effect that they grant “plenary remission of sins” and absolve “from all *poena* et *culpa* . . . contrary to the decrees of the Holy Fathers wholesomely issued in this matter.” *Register of Brantingham*, ed. Hingeston-Randolph, p. 380.

48. See further the attack on “newe pardons & pilgrimages” in the Wycliffite treatise *Of Prelates*: by “feyned pardons” the people are hindered from giving alms to the poor and needy and instead misdirect them to rich men and wastrels (Wyclif, *English Works*, ed. Matthew, p. 102). Thomas of Chobham had attacked fraudulent collection of alms, which deprives the poor of much-needed charity; *Summa praedicandi*, p. 88.

49. *Provinciale*, lib. III, tit. 23 (p. 231).

50. This may allude to the kind of indulgence which involved admission to, and participation in the benefits of, some sort of confraternity, as described on pp. 101–2 above. As Robert Swanson explains, these usually do *not* entail “the formal grant of so many years of pardon” from purgatorial pains “to be quantified (although the existence of such quantifiable remission may be assumed by the purchasers, and is sometimes made explicit in the document, or associated publicity material), but the right because the purchaser is associated with the institution or body to receive plenary absolution from a confessor of their own choice, and other privileges,” including the right of ecclesiastical burial: “Letters of Confraternity and Indulgence,” p. 42. The recipient’s pardon (together with his requisite contrition, etc.) therefore effects release from *poena*, while the confession he makes to his chosen priest effects release from *culpa*. If it may be assumed that Chaucer’s Pardoner participates in the distribution of this sort of indulgence, the following argument can be made. He deliberately obscures the fact that any pilgrim in possession of the “confraternity membership” type of pardon gets to choose his or her confessor. Rather he offers himself as their confessor, thrusts himself forward in that role, even though (as I will argue later) he does not have the priestly authority to hear confessions and absolve *a culpa*. Being licensed to distribute pardons is one thing; hearing confessions is something else—the former involves the key of jurisdiction; the latter, the key of holy orders. And, of course, the confessor chosen by the confraternity member would have to be a properly ordained priest in order to hear his confession legally and efficaciously.

51. But Chaucer’s character is *not* offering relics for sale, *pace* the incautious comments in some recent criticism. The point is rather that he wants the Canterbury pilgrims to make offerings to his relic-collection, as his previous victims have done and as his future victims will do; selling them would mean the loss of crucial props and therefore be bad for business. His dupes may kiss his relics (VI(C) 944), avail themselves of the healing water produced when one of them is dipped in a well (352–71), indeed wear one of them (a holy glove, 372–76): but the Pardoner retains possession of them. Cf. Siegfried Wenzel, “Chaucer’s Pardoner and His Relics,” *SAC* 11 (1989), 37–41. Despite the remark of Heywood’s editors that the pardoners in the relevant plays are engaged in “relic peddling” (p. 255), it is quite clear that actually they want their credulous clients to touch, kiss, wear (that holy glove reappears) and generally “reverence” their “relykes,” drink the water in which they’ve been dipped, and of course “offer” to them (*Pardoner and the Frere*, 94–96, 116, 141, 157, 180; *The Four PP*, 494–95).

52. Shinnars, *Medieval Popular Religion*, p. 11. The connection is significant, implying that pardoners were particularly associated with abuses involving relics. The chapter of Beverley Minster (in the archdiocese of York) at one point asks the genuine pardoners to arrest imposters “with all their false relics and muniments whatsoever”: see Swanson, *Church and Society*, p. 248. Other examples are given by Owst, *Preaching in Medieval England*, pp. 109–10, to which may be added the reference in the Lollard treatise *The Office of Curates* to the deceitful pardoner who comes with “stollen [stolen] bullis & false relekis” (Wyclif, *English Works*, ed. Matthew, p. 154). The assertion by Kellogg, “Chaucer’s Satire of the Pardoner,” pp. 233–34, n. 51, that relics are not normally associated with *quaestores* is inaccurate and misleading; cf. the critique of this claim by Wenzel, “Chaucer’s Pardoner and His Relics.” John Heywood’s pardoners also carry relics, and while these portrayals (in *The Pardoner and the Frere* and *The Four PP*) were certainly influenced by Chaucer’s they include further details which—however exaggerated for satiric purposes—may be taken as evidence of contemporary practice. The fourth novella of Masuccio Salernitano (c. 1410?–1475), and two sixteenth-century texts, the French farce *La triacleur, le pardonneur et la taverniere* and the Castilian *Vida de Lazarillo de Tormes*, all associate the distribution of indulgences with the promotion of false relics, and while these texts are later than Chaucer’s they may be taken as

supporting evidence for the proposition that his portrayal of a relic-carrying *quaestor* would not have come as a surprise to his contemporary audience. After all, as early as the eleventh-century religious bodies had sent out their representatives, replete with relics, to collect money for church-building; cf. P. Héliot and M. L. Chastang, "Quêtes et voyages de reliques au profit des églises françaises du moyen âge" [pt. 1], *Revue d'histoire ecclésiastique*, 59 (1964), 789–822; [pt. 2], 60 (1965), 5–32; also R. Kaiser, "Quêtes itinérantes avec des reliques pour financer la construction des églises (XIe–XIIe siècles)," *Le moyen-âge*, 101 (1995), 210–25.

53. Tr. Shinnars, *Medieval Popular Religion*, p. 11. Cf. the statement that they are not allowed to preach to the people nor expound anything other than what is contained in their letters, in Clement V's complaint about pardoners as reported in the *Regimen animarum* (London, British Library, MS Harley 2272), quoted by Kellogg, "Chaucer's Satire of the Pardoner," p. 217. And also the phrase in Pope Urban V's 1369 letter to Archbishop Wittlesey concerning the pardoners of the Hospitallers of St. John of Jerusalem (another part of which is discussed on p. 116 below), "praedicandum seu exponendum populo huiusmodi negotia quaestuarium offerentes." *Concilia magnae britanniae*, ed. David Wilkins (London, 1737), iii.84.

54. *Provinciale*, lib V, tit. 16 (p. 336).

55. Cf. Spencer, *English Preaching*, p. 118.

56. See below, pp. 119–35.

57. It could be argued, of course, that while pardoners were not permitted to preach as part and parcel of their profession, they could be permitted to undertake this activity in certain contexts and on certain occasions. It is permissible for literate men, although they are not priests or even deacons, to preach the word of God in churches and instruct the people, declares Thomas of Chobham. But this requires a special license (*Summa praedicandi*, p. 57). Does Chaucer's Pardoner have one? There is no evidence that he did—and if he had, then much if not all of the edge would be lost from Chaucer's satire: we would be faced with a figure who, however outrageous some of his remarks, was functioning in a perfectly legitimate manner, rather than overreaching himself on every front.

58. St. Bonaventure remarked that preaching and hearing confessions "are entrusted to the friars, so that by them they might support the faithful and make up for the lack of [secular] clerics [*defectum clericorum*]" ; cf. Robert A. Barbato, "The Gospel-Preaching Poor: The Combination of Priesthood and Religious Life in Saint Bonaventure" (M.A. diss. in Theology; University of California—Berkeley, 1989), p. 56. But of course, there were many tensions between friars and the secular clergy. On the process by which the Franciscans became involved in official ministry and took on public office, see Lawrence Landini, *The Causes of the Clericalization of the Orders of Friars Minor*, Pontifical University Gregorianum (Chicago, 1968).

59. Pace M. P. Hamilton, "The Credentials of Chaucer's Pardoner," *JEGP* 40 (1941), 48–72, who suggests that he might have been an Austin canon. The canons regular of St. Augustine maintained the priory and hospital at Charing Cross, as well as the French mother-house. F. N. Robertson remarks that at VI(C) 416 and 441ff. the Pardoner "speaks as if he belonged to a mendicant order" but adds that his reference to taking a wife in *the Wife of Bath's Prologue*, III (D) 166 may imply that "he was a layman or one of the lower clergy." *The Works of Geoffrey Chaucer*, 2nd ed. (London, 1957), p. 730.

60. It may be added that some pardoners worked for fraternities and were sometimes styled members of "brotherhoods": see for example Urban V's 1369 letter to Archbishop Wittlesey, cited on p. 116, and also Jusserand, "Chaucer's Pardoner and the Pope's," pp. 427–28, along with the materials collected by R. N. Swanson, *Catholic England: Faith, Religion and Observance Before the Reformation* (Manchester, 1993), pp. 201–2.

61. A point emphasized in Williams's article, "Documents on English Pardoners," esp. p. 206. But of course sometimes pardoners and friars are mentioned in the same breath (usually to condemn both groups), as in the document translated by Williams on pp. 203–4.

62. Transcribed and translated from Zouche's manuscript register, as held in the Borthwick Institute, York, by Williams, "Documents on English Pardoners," pp. 198–99.

63. *Riverside Chaucer*, p. 824. Cf. C. H. Miller and R. B. Bosse, "Chaucer's Pardoner and the Mass," *ChR* 6 (1972), 171–84.

64. Cf. H. A. Kelly, "Sacraments, Sacramentals, and Lay Piety in Chaucer's England," *ChR* 28 (1993), 5–22 (pp. 6, 14 n. 13).

65. *The Lay Folks Mass Book*, ed. T. F. Simmons, EETS OS 71 (London, 1879), pp. 98–99. However, as Simmons remarks, "No part of the service of the mass presents more marked variations in the different uses, diocesan, provincial, and monastic, than the offertory" (p.

66. Pace Miller and Bosse, who claim that the offertory “is sung only by the priest”: “Chaucer’s Pardoner and the Mass,” p. 173.

67. It was normal practice to preach after the offertory (i.e., not specifically the anthem, but rather the whole of the oblatory action). Cf. Simmons’s note in *Lay Folks Mass Book*, pp. 317–18. One of Arundel’s anti-Lollard constitutions of 1408 insists that preaching should be at the time of “the accustomed prayers” (“una cum precibus consuetis”), which Lyndwood glosses “in diebus Dominicis post Offertorium solitis Weri ad populum”: *Provinciale*, lib. V, tit. 5 (p. 291).

68. On the notion of the *quaestor* as guest-speaker, cf. G. R. Owst, *Preaching in Medieval England* (Cambridge, 1926), p. 100, who goes on to quote a passage in John Bromyard’s *Summa praedicantium* (s.v. *mors*) which describes how “messengers come round to the churches, from diverse hospitals, and preach that they have many weak and impotent inmates, and display large indulgences, and many things are given them—in truth, rightly enough.”

69. *The Episcopal Register of John de Grandisson*, ed. F. C. Hingeston-Randolph (London, 1897), pt. ii, pp. 1178–79; cf. Williams, “Documents on English Pardoners,” p. 200. Some Lollard texts also rail against such unholy alliances. For example, in “The Order of Priesthood” wicked priests are accused of teaching Christian men that they will have more thanks of God if they give alms to rich friars and “false pardoners” instead of to the poor (Wyclif, *English Works*, ed. Matthew, p. 175).

70. The Order of St. John of Jerusalem combined the care of the sick with military service, the latter feature being introduced toward the middle of the twelfth century. It became increasingly lax and materialistic, and during the thirteenth century was beset with much scandal.

71. *Concilia*, ed. Wilkins, iii.84.

72. Urban’s letter contains further charges against the Hospitallers’ pardoners, including the accusation that they cause divine services to be celebrated publicly even in places which are polluted or interdicted, and take it upon themselves (of their own volition) to have the bodies of the dead buried. Furthermore, they entrust the business of fundraising to simple and illiterate people, thereby spreading errors among the populace.

73. Cf. *MED* s.v. *lessoun*.

74. Cf. *MED* s.v. *storie*, a and b.

75. Middle English “rede,” like the corresponding Latin term *legere*, could mean the exposition of a given passage rather than the mere reading aloud of a text without elaboration or exegesis; cf. *MED* s.v. *redere*, c and e. However, in this context it seems definitely to refer to the practice of reading prescribed texts aloud in church.

76. As made by Hamilton, “Credentials,” p. 56, and Miller and Bosse, “Pardoner and the Mass,” p. 173.

77. Kelly relates Chaucer’s reference to “a lessoun or a storie” to the *lectiones et epistolae* which parish clerks read at Matins. This suggestion is appealing, for it eliminates the difficulty of accounting for the Pardoner’s involvement in the Mass service. However, there was no business reason for a pardoner to make an appearance at Matins; it was the Mass which gave him his opportunity to publish his indulgences and preach *pro questu*. More generally, Kelly compares the Pardoner’s activities to functions regularly performed by parish clerks, among whose ranks may be numbered Absolon in the *Miller’s Tale*. Once again, the parallel is attractive, especially in view of the other comparisons which may be made between these two characters (cf. pp. 151, 158 above), but parish clerks were tied to their parishes, whereas the Pardoner does not seem to have such an attachment. Cf. Kelly, “Sacraments,” pp. 6, 14 n. 8.

78. See, for example, Peter Lombard’s *Sentences*, where it is said that deacons are to read the New Testament (with the Gospel being specified) to the people; *Sent.* IV, dist. XXIV, 10, 2, and 4 (ii.402). Subdeacons were allowed to read the Epistle at Mass but certainly not the Gospel. Cf. Roger E. Reynolds, “The Subdiaconate as a Sacred and Superior Order,” rpt. as item IV in his *Clerics in the Early Middle Ages* (Aldershot, 1999), esp. pp. 8, 34; see further (for example) Aquinas, *In IV Sent.*, dist. XXIV, qu. 2, art. 2, sol., ad 3um and 4um (*Aquinatis opera*, vii.2.897), and Durandus of St Pourçain, *In IV Sent.*, dist. XXIV, qu. 3, resp., 6 (fol. 362r). An epistolary was one of the symbols given to an archdeacon at his ordination; at *his* ordination, the deacon would receive a Gospel book. Cf. Roger E. Reynolds, “The Ordination of Clerics in the Middle Ages,” rpt. as item XI in his *Clerical Orders in the Early Middle Ages* (Aldershot,

1999), p. 7.

79. Cf. Reynolds, "Subdiaconate as Sacred Order," pp. 10, 22. See further Aquinas, *In IV Sent.*, dist. XXIV, qu. 2, art. 1, sol. 3 (*Aquinatis opera*, vii.2.897); Bonaventure, *In IV Sent.*, dist. XXIV, pars 2, art. 2, qu. 1 (*Bonaventurae opera*, iv.629–30).

80. It may be that we are putting more weight on "lessoun" and "storie" than they can bear, particular in view of their wide range of possible meanings as listed in the *MED*, s.v. *lessoun* and *storie*. Against this, it may be pointed out that Chaucer accurately describes the Pardoner's sermon as coming after the offertory; cf. n. 67 above.

81. *Register of Grandisson*, ed. Hingeston-Randolph, pt. ii, pp. 1178–79; cf. Williams, "Documents on English Pardoners," p. 200.

82. Cf. the 1414 Oxford petition's reference to pardoners who "are not in holy orders" (quoted on p. 110 above). The *Memoriale presbiterorum* declares that no lay pardoner (*questorem laicum*) should be permitted to preach, because in general such people tell lies, and deceive simple parishioners and idiots (*ydeotas*); Cambridge, Corpus Christi College, MS 148, fol. 77v. Peter of la Palud, in stressing that *quaestores* merely announce rather than issue indulgences, notes that some of them are laymen; *In IV Sent.*, dist. XX, qu. 4, art. 1 (p. 267). The Pardoner in Heywood's *Four PP* is termed a "laye knave" (585) by the priest whose church he and the Frere have polluted by their altercation (cf. l. 547); thereby he is contrasted with the Frere, who of course is a religious. Prat the Constable threatens the Pardoner with the stocks, clearly indicating that he holds legal authority over him. "Most pardoners were probably ordinary artisans," suggests R. N. Swanson, noting that "in York the trade was considered sufficiently honest to gain admission to the city's freedom. Some pardoners had dual occupations, in significant overlaps like William Gyseley, mentioned as both scrivener and pardoner, or William Smyth, who was also a haberdasher": "Treasuring Merit/Craving Indulgence," p. 5.

83. I see no reason to doubt that it should be taken seriously—or, at least, as denoting an enterprise which this character regards as being within the bounds of possibility. Cf. my discussion in the final section of the present chapter.

84. This type of preaching was afforded some value and respect by the theoreticians of preaching, though of course it was not regarded as being of the highest rank. See pp. 145–46.

85. But it must be emphasized that even though the Pardoner uses the technical term "theme"—which refers to the opening quotation of a sermon—he does not actually preach a "thematic" sermon in the strict generic sense. See Siegfried Wenzel, "Chaucer and the Language of Contemporary Preaching," *SP* 73 (1976), 138–61 (pp. 139–40); and Spencer, *English Preaching*, pp. 113–14. Can, then, the Pardoner be said to preach a "sermon" in any authentically late-medieval sense of the term? In a crucially important contribution to this subject, Alan J. Fletcher argues that, if "the belief that the *Tale* is reminiscent of 'modern' sermon form" is decisively dismantled, we may then proceed to inquire into "what other sort of sermon it may instead suggest." "The Preaching of the Pardoner," reprinted in revised form in his *Preaching, Politics and Poetry in Late-Medieval England* (Dublin, 1998), pp. 249–65 (esp. pp. 253, 264–65). See further n. 95 below.

86. Migne *PL* 77, cols. 49C–126A. Cf. Humbert of Romans, *De eruditione praedicatorum*, iv, ed. Berthier, *Humberti opera*, ii.421–23, tr. Tugwell, *Early Dominicans*, pp. 246–47; *Oculus sacerdotis*, III pars, in MS Rawlinson, A370, 55r–v; Waleys, *De modo componendi sermones*, ed. Charland, *Artes praedicandi*, pp. 337–38; Higden, *Ars componendi sermones*, ed. Jennings, pp. 10–14.

87. Cambridge, University Library, MS ii.1.24, p. 333, transcribed by Fritz Kemmler, *Exempla in Context: A Historical and Critical Study of Robert Mannyng of Brunne's "Handlyng synne"* (Tübingen, 1984), p. 71. On Alexander of Ashby and his treatise, see J. J. Murphy, *Rhetoric in the Middle Ages* (Berkeley, 1974), pp. 312–17, but note the corrections in Kemmler, pp. 69–76. Alexander recommends a different method for the learned: the profundity of a pleasing allegory will please them. Cf. Humbert of Romans, who in the prologue to his *exempla*-collection says that "We should hesitate to offer *exempla* . . . to highly intelligent, wise men, unless they are particularly good and worth telling; we should offer them rather to people of less intelligence, for whom they are appropriate as milk is for babies" (*Early Dominicans*, tr. Tugwell, p. 375).

88. George J. Engelhardt, "Richard of Thetford: A Treatise on the Eight Modes of Dilation," *Allegorica*, 3 (1978), 77–160 (pp. 92–93). This treatise has been printed as the third book of the *Ars concionandi* in *Bonaventurae opera*, ix.17–21; see further H. C. Hazel, "A Translation,

with Commentary, of the Bonaventuran *Ars concionandi*" (Ph.D. diss., Washington State University, 1972). Richard may have been a canon of the Order of the Holy Sepulchre, which had a house in Thetford. Cf. Murphy, *Rhetoric in the Middle Ages*, pp. 326–29.

89. *Ars componendi sermones*, ed. Jennings, p. 5; cf. the similar statement in pseudo-Bonaventure, *Ars concionandi*, i.27 (*Bonaventurae opera*, ix.15); tr. Hazel, p. 77. On the composite nature of the *Ars concionandi*, see Murphy, *Rhetoric in the Middle Ages*, pp. 327, 329. The "first book," to which I here refer, is a self-contained anonymous and undated tract (beginning *Omnis tractatio*).

90. *De eruditione praedicatorum*, ii, ed. Berthier, *Humberti opera*, ii.402–4; tr. Tugwell, *Early Dominicans*, pp. 208–20.

91. But there is a major interpretative problem concerning the Pardoner's voice; see p. 168 below.

92. Cf. Doris T. Myers, who argues that in the Pardoner's case "The substitution of rhetorical flourishes and sensational anecdotes for solid instruction indicates that the preacher's art has been corrupted." "The *Artes praedicandi* and Chaucer's Canterbury Preachers" (Ph.D. diss., University of Nebraska–Lincoln, 1967), p. 131. But it must be admitted that this is a very controversial point. Alternatively, one could argue that the Pardoner, suiting his style to his audience, is using highly affective language to stir the lewd people's sense of sin. On this view, the preacher's art is not corrupted as such—the problem is rather that its proper effect has been subverted by the Pardoner's evil intention.

93. *De eruditione praedicatorum*, ii, ed. Berthier, *Humberti opera*, ii.403; tr. Tugwell, *Early Dominicans*, p. 220. On *ostentatio* cf. William of Pagula, *Oculus sacerdotis*, III pars, in MS Rawlinson A370, 55r–55v. John Bromyard, *Summa praedicantium*, s.v. *praedicator* (ii.259v), states that "sermones simplices et devoti" are the more useful, and declares his preference for the medical doctor who is *diligens* rather than *eloquens*. See further Henry of Ghent's *quaestio*, "Whether this science [i.e., theology] ought to talk about divine matters in a simple or ornate style" (*Summa questionum*, prologus, art. 20, qu. 4), which I discuss in "Medium and Message: Henry of Ghent on Scriptural Style," in R. Newhauser and John Alford (eds.), *Literature and Religion in the Later Middle Ages: Philological Studies in Honor of Siegfried Wenzel* (Binghamton, N.Y., 1994), pp. 209–35 (pp. 217–22). Henry argues that theology does not value an elaborate and carefully structured style if it hinders clear teaching; clarity is more important than elegance. On the other hand, following Augustine (*De doctrina christiana*, IV.v.8), it can be argued that at the man who is at once wise and eloquent is the more able: whoever "is willing to speak not only wisely but also eloquently will certainly be more helpful for having both gifts." But he should not overdo it. Excessive ornamentation should be eschewed, lest the reader be confused.

94. On these changes, see especially d'Avray, "The Transformation of the Medieval Sermon."

95. Alan J. Fletcher has argued that the Pardoner was practicing a recognizably "sensational" form of preaching involving heavy dependence on *exempla*, which could well have confirmed the more sophisticated members of Chaucer's audience in the view that "preaching so phrased could all too readily lend itself to manipulation by the unscrupulous"; "Preaching of the Pardoner," in his *Preaching, Politics and Poetry*, p. 264. Fletcher notes that "there seems by the 1390s to have evolved within orthodoxy itself the preference for a plainer approach to preaching similar inasmuch as it too esteemed unadorned discourse and distrusted the use of *trufas et fabulas*" (p. 263). This is highly persuasive but, given that there is no actual pardoner's sermon (or what could have passed for one) extant, it is difficult to speculate concerning the typicality or otherwise of what Chaucer's construct produces. More fundamentally, interpretation on this front is particularly difficult because of the enormous "taste barrier" between medieval and modern sensibilities. One might argue, for instance, that the tale of the quest for death is a story of dubious moral value because it excites fear rather than love and moves to attrition rather than contrition. But against that it could be noted that some of the *exempla* found in the main medieval collections make the Pardoner's creation look quite restrained by comparison. Moreover, telling a frightening tale was regarded as a perfectly permissible method of winning over an audience. "Another way is to frighten them by some terrifying tale or example," declares Robert of Basevorn with obvious approval, and reinforces the point with a horrible story as told by Jacques de Vitry—a preacher who, given his formidable and unimpeachable reputation, can hardly be dismissed as a sensationalist. *Forma praedicandi*, xxiv, ed. Charland, *Artes praedicandi*, p. 261; tr. Krul, p. 146. See further

the description of a certain kind of fear as a gift of the Holy Spirit, in for example *Jacob's Well*, ed. A. Brandeis, EETS OS 115 (London, 1900), p. 242; *A Myrour to Lewde Men and Wymmen*, ed. Venetia Nelson, Middle English Texts, 14 (Heidelberg, 1981), p. 85; *Ayenbite of Inwit, or Remorse of Conscience*, ed. Richard Morris, 2nd ed. by Pamela Gradon, EETS OS 23 (Oxford, 1965), pp. 118–19; *The Book of Vices and Virtues*, ed. W. N. Francis, EETS OS 217 (London, 1942), pp. 126–28. For a basic account of the distinction between contrition and attrition (the latter defined by the Council of Trent as a form of imperfect contrition that arises “from the consideration of the turpitude of sin, or from the fear of hell and of punishment”), see Thomas N. Tentler, *Sin and Confession on the Eve of the Reformation* (Princeton, 1977), esp. pp. 250–300. Controversially, Duns Scotus had regarded contrition as “attrition informed by grace”; see the section “Attrition and Contrition” in H. A. Oberman, *The Harvest of Medieval Theology: Gabriel Biel and Late Medieval Nominalism* (Grand Rapids, Mich., 1967), pp. 146–59 (p. 149).

96. *Summa de arte praedicatoria*, i, in PL 210, cols. 113B–C; tr. Evans, p. 20. A little earlier Alan says that “preaching should not glitter with verbal trappings, with purple patches.” A sermon which is too heavily embroidered appears to have been “contrived with excessive care, and elaborated to win the admiration of man, rather than for the benefit of our neighbours.” Alan advocates a stylistic “middle way.” PL 210, cols. 112C–D; tr. Evans, pp. 18–19. On the “mercenary preacher,” cf. especially the view of Henry of Ghent, as discussed in our previous chapter.

97. On the special significance of the imagery of the dove see below, pp. 123–25.

98. *De modo componendi sermones*, p. 332. On the importance of *modestia* in the movements of a preacher's body see J.-C. Schmidt, *La Raison des gestes dans l'occident médiéval* (Paris, 1990), p. 282.

99. *De modo componendi sermones*, p. 337. Cf. the standard insistence that, following confession, a priest should preserve strict confidentiality, as spelled out in the twenty-first canon of the Fourth Lateran Council: “But let him exercise the greatest precaution that he does not in any degree by word, sign, or any other manner make known the sinner, but should he need more prudent counsel, let him seek it cautiously without any mention of the person. He who dares to reveal a sin confided to him in the tribunal of penance, we decree that he be not only deposed from the sacerdotal office but also relegated to a monastery of strict observance to do penance for the remainder of his life.” Tr. Shinnars, *Medieval Popular Religion*, p. 10.

100. *The Book of Margery Kempe*, i.62, ed. Barry Windeatt (2000; rpt. Cambridge, 2004), p. 292. This, we are told, upsets Margery's supporters in the congregation. Cf. the discussion in Spencer, *English Preaching*, pp. 68–70.

101. With the exegesis of this passage by Thomas of Chobham and Robert of Basevorn (see pp. 41, 52 above) cf. the *Glossa ordinaria*, in *Biblia glossata*, iii.795 and Hugh of St. Cher's commentary, *Postilla seu expositiones in veteris et novi testamentum* (Paris, 1530–45), ii.117r. Hugh identifies the “sinner” in question as someone who habitually sins or “is notorious in sin. And such a one should not preach.”

102. *De eruditione praedicatorum*, ii, ed. Berthier, *Humberti opera*, ii.404–5; tr. Tugwell, *Early Dominicans*, p. 221.

103. Jerome, *Epistola lii*, in PL 22, col. 533. This well-known dictum is quoted by, for example, Humbert of Romans, *De eruditione praedicatorum*, ii, ed. Berthier, *Humberti opera*, ii.400; tr. Tugwell, *Early Dominicans*, p. 216, and by Peraldus, *Summa vitorum*, tract. VI, pars iii, cap. 7 (*Summa*, ii.117r–v) Cf. Matthew 23:3, “So practise and observe whatever they tell you, but not what they do; for they preach, but do not practise,” which is quoted in a similar context by Augustine, *De doctrina christiana*, IV.xxvii, ed. Green, p. 65; tr. Robertson, p. 165.

104. *De eruditione praedicatorum*, ii, ed. Berthier, *Humberti opera*, ii.404; tr. Tugwell, *Early Dominicans*, p. 221. Cf. Romans 2:21.

105. *Literature and Pulpit in Medieval England* (Oxford, 1966), p. 224. On Bromyard's intellectual milieu, see Peter Binkley, “John Bromyard and the Hereford Dominicans,” in Jan Willem Drijvers and A. A. MacDonald (eds.), *Centres of Learning. Learning and Location in Pre-Modern Europe and the Near East* (Leiden, 1995), pp. 255–64.

106. *Summa praedicatorum*, prologus (i.1r); cf. his section on *exemplum* (i.248r).

107. *Summa praedicatorum*, ii.256v.

108. See, for example, *The Book of Beasts, being a translation from a Latin Bestiary of the Twelfth Century*, ed. T. H. White (London, 1954), p. 144 (here an extensive comparison of

preachers with doves is offered), and Bartholomaeus Anglicus, as translated by John Trevisa, *On the Properties of Things*, ed. M. C. Seymour et al. (Oxford, 1975), i.616.

109. *Biblia glossata*, v.193–94; Hugh of St. Cher, *Postilla*, v.36r–v.

110. Bersuire, *Dictionarius*, s.v. *columba* (p. 326).

111. See for example Thomas Aquinas's discussion of this event, wherein the natural properties of the dove are said to designate the seven gifts of the Holy Spirit: *Summa theologiae*, 3a, qu. 39, art. 6, ad 4um (liii, 42–43).

112. *Properties of Things*, ed. Seymour et al., i.617.

113. *Dictionarius*, s.v. *columba* (pp. 325–26). *In malo*, this may be interpreted as indicating how many people look around and deliberate about their salvation, but, held back by the confusion of their conscience, they fail to fulfill their good intention and unexpectedly are shot with arrows (i.e., various temptations) fired by the fowler-devil. *Reductorium morale*, vii.17 (Venice, 1583), p. 193. In his *Dictionarius* Bersuire's *in bono* interpretation takes Isaiah 38:14 as its point of departure: "I meditate like a dove; my eyes are weary with looking up to heaven." The dove meditates for a long time, Bersuire explains, and its meditation ends in lamentation, thereby providing us with a model of exemplary behavior. He sums up the good interpretations of the bird's properties with the statement that "it is a simple, benevolent and benign bird, distinguished by many virtues and good natural properties, and it can signify any just man, and especially the churchman who, among and above other men, must be mild, humble, benign, agreeable, and distinguished by virtues."

114. Other vigilant birds included eagles, cocks, and ravens; Humbert of Romans notes that they can symbolize preachers: *De eruditione praedicatorum*, ii, ed. Berthier, *Humberti opera*, ii.409; tr. Tugwell, *Early Dominicans*, p. 226. Cf. the discussion by Myers, "*Artes praedicandi* and Chaucer's Canterbury Pilgrims," p. 20.

115. *Biblia glossata*, vi.311–12.

116. Cf. pp. 18, 359n above.

117. Hugh of St. Cher, *Postilla*, vi.99v.

118. Quoted from Paris, Bibliothèque Nationale de France, MS Lat. 12424, by Leclercq, "Le Magistère," p. 109.

119. *Ars componendi sermones*, ed. Jennings, pp. 7–8; cf. the similar statement in Thomas Waleys, *De modo componendi sermones*, i, ed. Charland, *Artes praedicandi*, p. 330.

120. For another version cf. Thomas of Chobham's *quaestio* on whether one should preach *pro questu*, which has been discussed on pp. 105–6 above. This is perfectly acceptable practice, explains Thomas, as long as the *principalis intentio* is stirring the hearts of the faithful to devotion; then the wish to see the faithful offering alms on account of one's preaching is unproblematic as a secondary intention.

121. Leclercq, "Le Magistère," pp. 116–17; cf. p. 40 above.

122. *Forma praedicandi*, v, ed. Charland, *Artes praedicandi*, p. 242; tr. Krul, p. 125. It was generally accepted, of course, that the preacher was entitled to the necessities of life; what worried the theorists was the question of whether he was entitled to think about such things during his preaching. For this point, see especially Thomas Aquinas, *quaestio* vi, art. 2, in *Quaestiones quodlibetales*, ed. R. Spiazzi, 8th ed. (Marietti, 1949), pp. 33–34. Cf. Humbert of Romans, *De eruditione praedicatorum*, i, ed. Berthier, *Humberti opera*, ii, 384; tr. Tugwell, *Early Dominicans*, pp. 194–95, cf. p. 221.

123. Given that certain pardoners were laymen, it could causuistically be argued that if Chaucer's creation was a layman then he does not owe his audience his devotion. But that would be to underline, yet again, the point that the Pardoner does not have the right to preach, not having been "sent" in the official manner intimated by Romans 10:15 (cf. p. 52 above).

124. *Ars versificatoria* [115], ed. Edmond Faral, *Les Arts poétiques du XIIIe et du XIVe siècle* (Paris, 1924), p. 150. See further the cogent application of this principle to the Pardoner's case by J. A. Burrow, *Medieval Writers and Their Work: Middle English Literature and Its Background 1100–1500* (Oxford, 1982), p. 111.

125. This passage from Philippians was quoted by St. Augustine in a similar context. In *De doctrina christiana*, IV.xxvii he argues that "the truth may be announced but not in truth, that is, evil and fallacious hearts may preach what is right and true" (ed. Green, p. 165; tr. Robertson, pp. 164–65).

126. *Summa praedicatorum*, s.v. *praedicator* (ii.261v–2r).

127. For comparable use of the imagery of water and possible pollution, see Peter of

Panastasia's discussion of whether baptism can be conferred by an evil minister (cf. p. 62 above).

128. Thomas of Bailly expressed the underlying principle here very well by explaining that preaching does not contain grace in itself or create grace of a specific type in the person who preaches. Such a state of grace would be antithetical to mortal sin of any kind, and therefore it would be impossible for a man to preach while in mortal sin—which, alas, is all too possible. In sum, the activity of preaching does not require in the person who performs it the spiritual purity which comes from grace. As Gregory says in his *Moralia*, a preacher whose words differ from his actions plants a seed which another eats, even though he himself does not feed on this seed. It is crucial to note that here Thomas is talking about the preacher who *secretly* does the contrary of what he preaches. *Quodlibet* iv, qu. 13, ed. Glorieux, pp. 320–21.

129. To be more precise, the Pardoner is morally deviant in respect of both types of sin identified by Henry of Ghent (cf. pp. 46–47 above), those committed in the pedagogic act itself (*ex ipso actu docendi*) and those committed through other actions (*ex actu alio*). That is to say, he is at once a vainglorious preacher and a lustful man. Henry's attempt to relegate the latter category of sin to the teacher's "private life"—and therefore to judge it irrelevant to the act of teaching itself—cannot be used as a means of mitigating the Pardoner's wrongdoing *qua* preacher, since admission of such sin is part of his performance to the Canterbury pilgrims; there is therefore nothing "private" about it.

130. Previously discussed in my introductory chapter.

131. Here I am echoing Thomas of Chobham's use of the prophet Isaiah's attack on those who "have proclaimed abroad (*publicauerunt*) their sin as Sodom, and they have not hid it" (Isaiah 3:9). On the notion of "publication" see above, pp. 4, 74, 95.

132. Cf. the view as expressed, for example, in the *Ayenbite of Inwit*, that those who sustain taverns are participators in, or accessories to, all the sins committed therein (ed. Morris and Gradon, p. 57). This matter will be discussed further in the next section, in relation to Chaucer's eucharistic humor.

133. *Complete Works*, ed. G. C. Macaulay (Oxford, 1899–1901), i.96: tr. William Burton Wilson (East Lansing, 1992), p. 114, to which I have added a few clarifications. Turning to the historical records concerning pilgrimage, it may be noted that innkeepers generally receive a bad press therein, being accused of a wide variety of abuses, including pressuring people into staying in their establishments, failing to provide the good beds they promised, and getting their clients drunk (perhaps even drugging them) so they can rob them while they sleep. On the legislation which sought to protect pilgrims from such practices see Birch, *Pilgrimage to Rome*, pp. 85–86. Little wonder that Harry Bailly should feel unloved.

134. *Fasciculi zizaniorum*, pp. 277–82; cf. Joseph Dahmus, *William Courtenay, Archbishop of Canterbury, 1381–1396* (University Park, Pa., 1966), p. 81. See further the accounts in Walsingham, *Historia anglicana*, ed. Riley, ii.53; and Knighton, *Chronicon*, ed. Lumby, ii.158–60; also the *responsio* of Nicholas Hereford and Philip Repingdon, *Fasciculi zizaniorum*, pp. 319–25.

135. In similar vein, Richard Wyche (allegedly) believed that if confession is necessary one should not approach a vicious priest, but instead find a discreet confessor who is living a good life. If you confess fully to him, you will be absolved as fully as if St. Peter himself had descended from heaven to perform the absolution. *Fasciculi zizaniorum*, p. 502.

136. Dahmus, *William Courtenay*, p. 81.

137. Proposition 14, in *Fasciculi zizaniorum*, p. 280; cf. Walsingham, *Historia anglicana*, ii.53.

138. *Fasciculi zizaniorum*, p. 277. Cf. Pope Gregory XI's earlier bull on the same subject; Walsingham, *Historia anglicana*, ed. Riley, i.345–47. Clearly, the University was slow to respond to such entreaties.

139. *Fasciculi zizaniorum*, p. 390. Conversely, the divine law gives a priest sufficient warrant to preach, no other license being necessary. See *Fasciculi zizaniorum*, p. 387; Knighton, *Chronicon*, ed. Lumby, ii.179.

140. *Fasciculi zizaniorum*, pp. 389, 403. Cf. the Wycliffite tract *Of Prelates* in Wyclif, *English Works*, ed. Matthew, p. 95, and also the contrast between Christ's church and the devil's church, as discussed below.

141. *De veritate*, ed. Buddensieg, iii.63–68.

142. *De officio pastoralis*, in Wyclif, *English Works*, ed. Matthew, pp. 442–43.

143. See, for example, the tract *Why Poor Priests Have no Benefice* in *English Works of Wyclif*, ed. Matthew, pp. 245–53; also Hawisia Moone's Confession, in *Selections from English Wycliffite Writings*, ed. Hudson, p. 35. Hudson summarizes the heterodox view as follows: "the only foundation for the exercise of authority lies in virtue, and not in the institution. Priesthood is conferred by God on the virtuous man" (p. 151). Cf. Hudson's article "Lollardy: The English Heresy?" in her *Lollards and Their Books*, pp. 156–57.

144. *Of Prelates*, in Wyclif, *English Works*, ed. Matthew, p. 59. A little later the same treatise attacks preachers who do not allow the people to hear God's word freely, but rather preach "lesyngis" and "fablis" whereby they rob them (p. 60). And another text in Matthew's anthology, *The Order of Priesthood*, complains about "anticristis prechouris" who preach for personal gain ("for here wynnyng") using "fablis and newe soteltes" (p. 175). See further *English Wycliffite Sermons*, ed. Graddon and Hudson, iv.81–82, 143–44. In much Lollard discussion of preaching the emphasis falls not on devalued preaching but rather on the necessity of evangelical preaching, which is defined as the most important of all priestly duties; cf. the comment by Graddon and Hudson, iv.79.

145. *Rosarium theologie*, ed. von Nolcken, p. 73.

146. The text goes on to advise preachers not "to expoune to be puple gramer or fablez of Jupiter [or siche]" (*Rosarium*, ed. von Nolcken, p. 73). The Lollard tract *Of Clerks Possessioners* complains about preachers who show off by using chronicles, poems, and personal inventions ("cronyckis & poisies & newe fyndynges of hem self") in their sermons. Wyclif, *English Works*, ed. Matthew, p. 124.

147. Cf. p. 119 above.

148. *De officio pastoralis*, in Wyclif, *English Works*, ed. Matthew, p. 435.

149. Cf. Fletcher, "Preaching of the Pardoner," in his *Preaching, Politics and Poetry*, p. 250. Moreover, it should be noted that in the first place such a person would have been an unlikely member of the company described by Chaucer, given the Lollard contempt for pilgrimages, on which see Hudson, *Premature Reformation*, pp. 56, 94, 156, 196, 279, 301–3, 307–9, etc.

150. On Lollard iconoclasm, see Hudson, *Premature Reformation*, pp. 301–7; also Margaret Aston, "Lollards and Images," in *Lollards and Reformers*, pp. 135–92, along with her *England's Iconoclasts: Laws Against Images* (Oxford, 1988), pp. 96–59.

151. On the other hand, it should be noted that—according to Walsingham—Sir John Montagu (whose French poetry won the praise of Christine de Pizan) had ordered all the images in the chapel at his Shenley estate removed and "put in secret places." Given the popularity of the image of St. Katherine, he allowed this to be moved into the bakery. Cf. *Historia anglicana*, ed. Riley, ii.159. This may serve as a warning against anachronistic generalizations concerning the "artistic" sensibilities of Lollard knights.

152. Cf. pp. 73–74, 88–89 above.

153. Here I borrow an idiom from W. B. Yeats' poem *The Statues*.

154. Here I return to the words of Chaucer's Friar, III(D) 1277.

155. Cf. Isidore of Seville's definition of the *fabulae poetarum*, as quoted in my introductory chapter.

156. Cf. the germane argument of Alan Fletcher, that Chaucer "diverted matter originally of ecclesiastical sensitivity into the domain of a courtly practice and conversation." He adds that this relocation "of matter from one arena to another" may also be seen as part and parcel of "a democratizing of access to the intellectual property of clerical culture" which characterizes "the 1380s and 1390s" ("Chaucer the Heretic," pp. 111–12). See further Larry Scanlon's argument that, in appropriating features of both the sermon *exemplum* and the public/secular *exemplum*, Chaucer was tapping confluent sources of clerical and lay authority for his vernacular writing; *Narrative, Authority, and Power*, esp. pp. 137–38.

157. *Mirk's Festial: A Collection of Homilies*, ed. T. Erbe, EETS ES 96 (London, 1905), p. 169. The same views are expressed in Mirk's *Manuale sacerdotis*, i.18, in MS Bodley 549, 136v–7r. For Mirk's anti-Wycliffite views see Alan J. Fletcher, "John Mirk and the Lollards," *MÆ* 56 (1987), 217–24. The dating of the *Festial* given above is Fletcher's (p. 218).

158. *De officio pastoralis*, in Wyclif, *English Works*, ed. Matthew, p. 418.

159. *De Eucharistia*, ed. Loserth, pp. 112–14. Cf. H. B. Workman, *John Wyclif: A Study of the English Medieval Church* (Oxford, 1926), ii.13, 41.

160. Ian Levy argues that Wyclif can say this because he "does not believe that the host has undergone a substantial change following consecration." It is precisely because "the

"natural goodness" of the same bread as that of a piece of unconsecrated bread" that its "moral goodness" may be said to "vary depending upon the merit and holiness of the priest," for "the priest is himself capable of greater sanctity than this inanimate object." While each and every Eucharist may be said to be identical in respect of "the sanctity derived from the body of Christ," "the sanctity derived from the blessing of the priest actually varies according to his own merit." In this respect, then, wicked priests may be said to deprive their parishioners. Thus Wyclif tries to reconcile his position with that of canon law. Cf. Levy, "Was John Wyclif's Theology of the Eucharist Donatistic?" pp. 146–47, and also the relevant discussion of these matters in my introductory chapter and Chapter 2. It must freely be admitted that previous theologians had accepted the notion of levels of priestly effectiveness in relation to personal sanctity, while affirming that the sacraments (as administered by any ordained priest) were valid in themselves. For instance, in his comment on the startling passage wherein Peter Lombard speculates that the excommunicate or manifestly heretical priest is unable to confect the Eucharist, St. Bonaventure argues that if the priest is a heretic those who knowingly attend his mass will receive the true body of Christ (termed the *res prima*) but not the spiritual benefit (the *res ultima*, which is mystical union with Christ). In *IV Sent.*, dist. XIII, art. 1, qu. 1, conclusio; *Bonaventurae opera*, iv.303. But, as our discussion in Chapter 1 has indicated, the problematic nature of the Lombard's remarks were widely recognized, and the need for extreme caution perceived. Wyclif moves onto dangerous ground in at least two ways—his rather arrogant assumption that he, far better than the Church authorities, knows what a heretic is, and his conviction that immoral priests short-change their parishioners, even bringing them into grave spiritual danger. (I am most grateful to Ian Levy for discussion of these matters.)

161. *De Eucharistia*, ed. Loserth, p. 114. Cf. Levy, "Was John Wyclif's Theology of the Eucharist Donatistic?" p. 147. Wyclif's take on "fruitfulness" here may be contrasted with what Aquinas had to say on the same subject (cf. p. 58 above). Citing Augustine's anti-Donatist sentiments, Aquinas says that "in so far as they are said in the person of the whole Church, of which the priest is the minister," the "prayers even of a sinful priest are fruitful." In contrast, his "private" prayers are not fruitful. Wyclif seems to be blurring this distinction. Thomas Netter certainly thought so, for (in his virulently anti-Donatist *Tractatus de ministro sacramentorum*) he accused Wyclif of failing to distinguish between the "effect" and the "fruit" of the sacrament; *Doctrinale*, ii.58–60. A little later (cols. 91–92) Netter carefully contrasts the "substance" of the sacrament with its "circumstances" (the priest's prayers, compunction, etc.). In respect of the latter, and the latter only, a pious priest can administer the sacrament in a better way than an impious one. (In other words, "administering a better sacrament" and "administering the sacrament in a better way" are quite different things.)

162. *De veritate*, ed. Buddensieg, iii.6–7. The *Apology for Lollard Doctrines* claims that deadly sin is committed by a person who knowingly hears the mass of a bad priest (pp. 37–40); cf. the views expressed in the treatise *De precatationis sacris*, discussed in our previous chapter. In *De officio pastorali* it is asserted that tithes should be given to priests if they live well (Wyclif, *English Works*, ed. Matthew, p. 431); the concomitant view, that they should be withheld from priests who do not live well, is frequently expressed in Lollard writings.

163. Thomas Netter attributed to Wyclif the idea that the power to consecrate the sacraments is suspended while a priest is living in mortal sin, identifying this as a lapse into Donatism. *Doctrinale*, ii.54–58 (*quod potestas consecrationis sacramentalis non suspenditur in praelato, propter omne mortale peccatum*).

164. *Of Prelates*, in Wyclif, *English Works*, ed. Matthew, p. 102. The context of this remark is crucial; see the discussion of this in our introductory chapter.

165. R. E. Nichols, "The Pardoner's Ale and Cake," *PMLA* 82 (1967), 498–504 (p. 502).

166. To take a phrase from *Vices and Virtues*, ed. Francis, p. 46.

167. For an excellent introduction to the tradition see R. F. Yeager, "Aspects of Gluttony in Chaucer and Gower," *SP* 81 (1984), 42–55.

168. *Myroure*, ed. Nelson, p. 211. Cf. *Ayenbite of Inwit*, ed. Morris and Gradon, pp. 56–57; *Vices and Virtues*, ed. Francis, pp. 53–54; *Jacob's Well*, ed. Brandeis, p. 148 (see further p. 152, on the tavern). In the *Speculum Christiani* the "synnes of mouth" are said to include "outrage or vnleuefull tastyng, etyng, or drynkyng; ydel ianglyng; wordes of harlotrye spekyng; godes holy name in veyne takyng;. . . vayn sweryng; for-sweryng; schlaundryng": *Speculum Christiani*, ed. G. Holmstedt, EETS OS 182 (London, 1933), pp. 84–87. See further the contrast between Christ's church and the devil's church made in *The*

Lanterne of Light, ed. L. M. Swinburn, EETS OS 151 (London, 1917), esp. pp. 54–65; also the advice given in Mirk's *Instructions for Parish Priests*, "Tauernes also thow moste for-sake" (ed. Kristensson, p. 69).

169. *Myroure*, ed. Nelson, pp. 216–17. Cf. *Ayenbite of Inwit*, ed. Morris and Gradon, p. 64; *Vices and Virtues*, ed. Francis, p. 62; *Jacob's Well*, ed. Brandeis, p. 153 ("þei rende god iche lyne fro oper").

170. Cf. John 19:31–36, where we read that the soldiers do not break Christ's legs, so that the Scripture "should be fulfilled, a bone of him shall not be broken." This was generally taken as referring back to Exodus 12:46 and Numbers 9:12, where it is forbidden to break the bones of animals eaten at the Passover feast.

171. Interestingly, some lists of the "synnes of þe mouth" include "reprouyng anoper man of þing þat he himself is gulty of"; *Myroure*, ed. Nelson, p.126. Cf. *Jacob's Well*, ed. Brandeis, p. 295.

172. With this passage may be compared the similar disquisition in Gower's *Mirour de l'omme*, ll. 25993–26124. Here the tavern-keeper is accused of "deceitfully mixing the wine of the new year together with the old wine of the previous year, which lies spoiled in its barrel and is neither healthy, nor good, nor wholesome" (25993–97). Furthermore, he may add "a red tint to white wine for serving in the tavern" (26029–31), or, if "the wine is too red," put some white wine into it, then commend its attractive colour to his client (26041–46). "Fraud is all full of deceit when he thus unites so many different wines from Spain, Guyenne, France, and even the Rhine, whereby he makes a profit. And if he can get a strong wine, he knows well how to fill up his measure with fresh water, making such a blend that he who drinks it will drink the water together with the wine and will in the end pay for the water" (26053–64). "Fraud knows, better than any master of divinity (*mestre de divin*), all the art of wine and the deceit and cunning of it. By his ingenuity he falsifies (*contrefait*) Rhine wine with French wine. And even the wine which grew near the Thames River he acidifies and disguises (*desguise*) and says it is of Rhenish growth" (26113–21). Then Gower moves on to the problem of Fraud in respect of ale, which is drunk in vast quantities by the English. *Complete Works*, ed. Macaulay, i.288–89; tr. Wilson, pp. 341–42. That crack about the *mestre de divin* apart, Gower shows no interest in pursuing ecclesiastical allusions or parallels, in contrast with Chaucer who, as I argue above, made such traditional complaint about unscrupulous innkeepers part of a jocular subtext relating to the Eucharist.

173. On eucharistic imagery in the *Pardoner's Tale* see Nichols, "The Pardoner's Ale and Cake," especially pp. 501–4; Janet Adelman, "That We May Leere Som Wit," in Dewey R. Faulkner (ed.), *Twentieth Century Interpretations of the "Pardoner's Tale"* (Englewood Cliffs, N.J., 1973), pp. 96–106 (pp. 99–100); H. Marshall Leicester, "'Synne Horrible': The Pardoner's Exegesis of His Tale, and Chaucer's," in M. J. Carruthers and E. D. Kirk (eds.), *Acts of Interpretation; Essays on Medieval and Renaissance Literature in Honor of E. T. Donaldson* (Norman, Okla., 1982), pp. 25–50 (pp. 40–41).

174. Cf. the discourse of an interpolation in one of Odo of Cheriton's sermons, where the way in which good wine is given a bad taste by a dirty cup is compared with the Word of God which, while sweet in itself, "often seems disagreeable to the listeners" because "it is dispensed from a polluted vessel (that is to say, from the mouth of a sinner)." Transcribed from Cambridge, Gonville and Caius College, MS 362(441), fols. 2v–3r by Spencer, *English Preaching*, p. 99.

175. As has been noted in our introductory chapter, the Lollards' opponents were quick to attribute Donatist opinions to them, but the Lollards' (and certainly Wyclif's) own views in this area were more equivocal.

176. Cf. pp. 19–20, 359–60n, 404n above.

177. See for example Fletcher's view (summarized in n. 95 above) that Chaucer attributes to the Pardoner a recognizably "sensational" form of preaching which he would have expected the more sophisticated part of his audience to disdain.

178. Lotario dei Segni (Pope Innocent III), *De miseria condicionis humane*, ed. and tr. Robert E. Lewis, The Chaucer Library (Athens, Ga., 1978; rpt. London, 1980), pp. 164–65. (I have made some changes to Lewis's translation, mainly to bring out the parallels between the two kinds of "ministry," cooking and confection of the sacrament.) Cf. the attack in the *Ayenbite of Inwit* on gluttons who like their "metes by wel agraybed [prepared] and ech to his oþene smac [taste, relish]; also they make "of one mete uele [many] mes desgyed uor hare uoule lost [of one meat many 'disguised' or elaborate dishes for their foul lust]" (ed.

Morris and Gradon, pp. 55–56). See further the *Myroure's* critique of those who “ete ouerdeyntevousliche” (ed. Nelson, p. 210); also *Jacob's Well*, ed. Brandeis, p. 144, and *Vices and Virtues*, ed. Francis, p. 52. Similar discourse may be found in John Gower's *Mirour de l'omme*, which speaks of how the “delicate person does not mind exciting his appetite; diverse sauces he wants to have for both his roasts and his boiled meat so that they may eat them to his greater delight” (7837–41). On holy days, when he should abstain from fish and meat, he finds other delicacies to eat, thereby keeping “the form (*fourme*) of fasting” while maintaining “the substance (*matiere*) of gluttony.” “Now it is necessary, Gower continues, “to grind, strain, turn upside down everything which God made in such plenitude; so it seems to me that a delicate person in his eating wants to change both God and His ordinance” (7849–61, 7951–56). Gower, *Complete Works*, ed. Macaulay, i.91–92; tr. Wilson, pp. 108–10.

179. On Chaucer's lost translation of *De miseria* see the introduction to Lewis's edition, pp. 17–31. On other possible borrowings from this treatise in the *Pardoner's Tale* see pp. 8–11.

180. According to the orthodox theory, the substance of the bread and wine changed into the body and blood of Christ while the accidents (appearance, taste, etc.) of the elements remained. Wyclif refused to accept that accidents can exist apart from substance in such a manner; his own solution (which developed over a period of time in his thinking) involved a theory of consubstantiation, i.e., the doctrine that after the consecration both the bread and wine and the body and blood of Christ coexisted. Or, to speak more plainly, material bread and wine still existed in the elements. In an impressive attempt to throw light on this complicated matter, David Aers has argued that, whilst believing that “allegorically or sacramentally” Christ was really present in the sacrament, Wyclif refused to believe in the real presence of Christ's Galilean body in the sacrament. Rejecting that view as being incompatible with orthodoxy, his opponents in effect presented “their fellow Christians with a brutally clear alternative: Does the Galilean body of Christ totally displace the bread or does it not? No complex answer is allowed. If it is ‘no,’ then the judge rules that the respondent is outside the Catholic church” (*Sanctifying Signs*, pp. 60–61). In my own view, “orthodox” opinion on this matter in Chaucer's day cannot be reduced to issues centering on Christ's Galilean body—a materializing move which Aers nicely illustrates with reference to eucharistic miracles. Wyclif's suspicious attitude to such occurrences (for which see *Iohannis Wyclif sermones*, ed. F. D. Matthew (London, 1887–90), ii.165, 460) would certainly have been shared by many of the great schoolmen of the thirteenth century, including Thomas Aquinas—whose views circulated widely in the fourteenth century in various compilations and priests' handbooks. At any rate, the discourse of consubstantiation features in many Lollard heresy trials, as for example when William Swinderby was accused of holding that “accidentia non possunt esse in sacramento altaris sine subiecto,” and that material bread remained with the body of Christ in the sacrament. *Registrum Iohannis Trefnant*, ed. Capes, p. 235; cf. *English Wycliffite Sermons*, ed. Gradon and Hudson, iv.54–55, 144–45. In one strand of Wycliffite thought, a belief in the (partly or purely) memorial nature of the sacrament developed; cf. Hudson, *Premature Reformation*, pp. 284–86, and *English Wycliffite Sermons*, ed. Gradon and Hudson, iv.51.

181. The importance of this event as the major watershed in Wyclif's career is emphasized by Anthony Kenny, *Wyclif*, Past Masters Series (Oxford, 1985), p. 80.

182. Kenny, *Wyclif*, p. 89.

183. As Aquinas described it. For this and the following Bonaventure reference see p. 54 above.

184. *Liber contra XII errores et hereses Lollardorum*, ed. Cronin, p. 130. Dymmok goes on to accuse Lollards of naive materialism and literalism, asking, “what sensible change do you see in a boy newly baptized, in a man who has confessed, in a boy or man who has been confirmed, in consecrated bread, in a man ordained to the priesthood, in marriageable persons betrothed or joined?” The Wycliffite riposte would turn that accusation on its head, claiming that it is the present-day church that puts too much emphasis on external signs, refusing to see the inner, divinely determined, realities. This comes out well in Wyclif's theology concerning “marriageable persons betrothed or joined,” which is discussed in Chapter 4 below. For further analysis of the Dymmok passage see Paul Strohm, *England's Empty Throne: Usurpation and the Language of Legitimation, 1399–1422* (New Haven, 1998), p. 61, and Aers, *Sanctifying Signs*, pp. 54, 64, 78, etc.

185. Here I borrow phrases from Strohm, *England's Empty Throne*, pp. 32–62, a chapter

which elaborates arguments initially offered in his brilliant 1995 article “Chaucer’s Lollard Joke.” While agreeing completely with Strohm’s statement that “the Lancastrians participated in shaping and focusing the very threat which they then obliged themselves to chastise” (*Empty Throne*, p. 36), I would quibble with the claim that “The Lollards’ heresy was effectively *founded*—ironically, through no particular choice of their own—in the quarrel over the eucharist” (p. 47, emphasis mine). Many other doctrines were identified as symptoms of the heresy, as witnessed by the lists of deviant opinions (which show a high degree of ideological interrelationship) that were being drawn up from 1377 onward, that being the year when Pope Gregory XI’s curia condemned eighteen of Wyclif’s positions, having investigated a total of fifty. The notion that Lollards had no real “choice” in choosing the theology of the Eucharist as a (Strohm would say *the*) major doctrinal battlefield is a curious denial of agency to the individuals concerned, and (I would argue further) is belied by the amount of sophisticated discussion of the matter found in Lollard texts. While I find highly appealing Strohm’s elegant account of the role which William Sawtry’s (perhaps inevitable) failure to say the right things about the Eucharist played in securing his conviction, it should be noted that other early Lollards were far from tongue-tied on the subject, and not blinded by science—see for instance the thoughtful eucharistic theology of Walter Brut and William Thorpe, well described by Aers, *Sanctifying Signs*, pp. 67–98. Then again, while such “ground” was indeed “argumentatively vexed,” many Lollards *did* confidently sustain their positions “against the full weight of orthodox institutions,” knowing full well what they thought and knowing that it would cost them dear.

186. On this range of opinion, see especially G. Fontaine, *Subsistent Accident in the Philosophy of Saint Thomas and in His Predecessors* (Washington, D.C., 1950); Gary Macy, *The Theologies of the Eucharist in the Early Scholastic Period* (Oxford, 1984); and Miri Rubin, *Corpus Christi: The Eucharist in Late Medieval Culture* (Cambridge, 1991).

187. *Book of Margery Kempe*, ed. Windeatt, pp. 234–35.

188. Besides, the fit is inexact. Wyclif and his followers were accused of believing that subject cannot exist without accident (*accidens non esse sine subjecto*) and concluding that the doctrine of transubstantiation is false. If, for example, the host tastes like bread then (in some manner of speaking) it is bread. But Innocent was joking about turning substance into accident (*substantiam vertit in accidens*). Here the idea is that the taste of some elaborate dish may bear little or no resemblance to that of its base ingredient; a skilled cook, being an expert manipulator of accidents, can make (say) a piece of meat look, smell, and taste just as he wishes. To make the same point with reference to the sin which is one of the main targets of Chaucer’s satire, one may recall how the *Ayenbite of Inwit* attacked those gluttons who make “of one mete” many “desgyssed” (disguised) dishes for their foul lust (see n. 178 above). Inasmuch as Chaucer made Innocent’s joke his own, it could be said that the poet is mocking Wycliffite faith in the relationship between substance and accident: in other words, we are dealing with an *anti*-Lollard joke.

189. The topicality of the *Pardoner’s Tale* is brought out well by Alan J. Fletcher, “The Topical Hypocrisy of the Pardoner,” reprinted in revised form in his *Preaching, Politics and Poetry*, pp. 266–80. Though he does refer to the eucharistic controversy “stirred up by the Lollards” (pp. 269–70), Fletcher’s focus is on the issue of religious hypocrisy, which featured prominently in “Lollard and Anti-Lollard debate” (p. 270).

190. Cf. the discussion *De avaritia scientiae* in Peraldus, *Summa vitorum*, tract. IV, pars ii, cap. 14 (*Summae*, ii, 71r–71v). Here Langland is dramatizing a notion commonly found in preacher’s aids and reference books.

191. Cf. p. 40 above.

192. The basic idea behind this is another commonplace of the preacher’s handbooks. For example, cf. Mirk’s argument that “it is better to know a little and live well than with much knowledge and a bad life to perish in eternity”: *Manuale sacerdotis*, i.9, in MS Bodley 549, fol. 129r.

193. See Minnis, Scott, and Wallace, *Medieval Literary Theory*, pp. 200–203. The notions of *affectus* and *intellectus* are well applied in interpretation of *Piers Plowman* by J. S. Wittig, “*Piers Plowman* B, Passus IX–XII: Elements in the Design of the Inward Journey,” *Traditio*, 28 (1972), 211–80, and James Simpson, “From Reason to Affective Knowledge: Modes of Thought and Poetic Form in *Piers Plowman*,” *MÆ* 55 (1986), 1–23.

194. *The Scale of Perfection*, i.4, ed. Thomas H. Bestul (Kalamazoo, Mich., 2000), p. 34.

195. Hilton says that some men who possess such knowledge “kepe hem in mekenesse

and charité,” and “fleen worldli and fleischly synnes,” but others turn it “into pride and veynglorie of hemself, or into coveityse or desiryng of worldli staatis, worschipes or riches” (ed. Bestul, p. 34).

196. *The Repressor of Over Much Blaming of the Clergy*, ed. C. Babington, Rolls Series, 19 (London, 1860), i.35.

197. *Summa praedicandi*, ed. Morenzoni, p. 58. However, the *superiores* should certainly understand the sacred lections and explain them to their congregations. Nothing here, of course, is being said in defense of clerical ignorance or lack of diligence, which Thomas reprehends vigorously elsewhere in his *Summa praedicandi*.

198. See, for example, *Lay Folks Mass Book*, ed. Simmons, pp. 24–27. For the bigger picture, see John Bossy, “The Mass as a Social Institution, 1200–1700,” *Past and Present*, 100 (1983), 29–61; Eamon Duffy, *The Stripping of the Altars: Traditional Religion in England c. 1400–c. 1580* (New Haven, 1992), pp. 109–30; and Aers, *Sanctifying Signs*, pp. 72–75. Furthermore, at a time when general communion was very infrequent, and when it did happen only one element, the bread, was offered to the laity (the wine being reserved for clergymen), the offertory took on a special significance, as the members of the congregation would proceed to the altar to make their offerings, whether in the form of mass-pennies or of valuable materials needed for the maintenance of the church, such as candle wax (always in demand for making candles and votive offerings). But of course, the ideals of participation and inclusion which such rituals sought to promote could be undermined by people who found therein occasion for social point-scoring: it may be recalled how the Wife of Bath gets angry if anyone “to the offryng bifore hire sholde goon” (I(A) 449–52).

199. “The Pardoner’s Homosexuality and How It Matters,” *PMLA* 95 (1980), 8–22 (p. 8).

200. *Roman Homosexuality: Ideologies of Masculinity in Classical Antiquity* (Oxford, 2000).

201. Williams, *Roman Homosexuality*, p. 7. According to Mathew Kuefler, what happened subsequently was that Christianity came to offer Roman men, troubled by the military and political collapse of the empire, a renewed valorization of their ideals of masculinity (to the detriment of some of the movement’s most radical doctrines, including the putative belief in “a genderless and sexless ideal,” “no more male or female”). This involved the rejection of certain practices previously considered to have no bearing on their own status as men, such as pederasty. The “ancient dichotomy” between “penetrated males who were stigmatized and penetrating males who were not. . . was largely abandoned in late antiquity in favour of a condemnation of both roles as unmanly” (p. 95). *The Manly Eunuch: Masculinity, Gender Ambiguity, and Christian Ideology in Late Antiquity* (Chicago, 2001), pp. 2, 95, 287–88, 294.

202. Williams, *Roman Homosexuality*, p. 225.

203. Williams, *Roman Homosexuality*, pp. 4–5; “I apply the concepts of homosexuality and heterosexuality heuristically, in order to expose their historical specificity and their inadequacy as categories of analysis in a description of Roman ideological traditions. . . . Consequently, my entire project, and not least its title, implies a certain ironic distance.”

204. “Claiming the Pardoner: Toward a Gay Reading of Chaucer’s Pardoner’s Tale,” *Exemplaria*, 6 (1994), 115–39 (pp. 121, 125, 139). Cf. the similar statement made by McAlpine, “The Pardoner’s Homosexuality,” p. 8.

205. Jeffrey Weeks, *Invented Moralities: Sexual Values in an Age of Uncertainty* (Cambridge, 1995), p. 115.

206. Joseph Bristow, discussing Weeks’s views, in *Sexuality* (London, 1997), p. 221.

207. Judith Butler, *Gender Trouble* (New York, 1990), p. 136.

208. Curry, *Chaucer and the Medieval Sciences*, rev. ed. (New York, 1960), pp. 54–70. Several scholars have accepted (unwarily) notions of actual castration, physical dismemberment, and/or absence mainly or merely as a basis for symbolic readings of Chaucer’s Pardoner. Robert Miller presents him as a *eunuchus non Dei*, a sinner who has cut himself off from virtue and good works: “Chaucer’s Pardoner, The Scriptural Eunuch, and The Pardoner’s Tale,” *Speculum*, 30 (1955), 180–99. In Chapter 6 of her *Chaucer’s Sexual Poetics* (Madison, 1989), Carolyn Dinshaw argues that the Pardoner’s relics at once indicate his own “fragmentariness” (both physical and psychological) and function, quite inadequately, as “substitutes for his own masculine lack”—they “cannot really produce that desired integrity, and he knows it” (pp. 161–64, 167–68). Furthermore, the Pardoner reveals the nature of human language itself as it functions “in a postlapsarian world, cut off from primary wholeness and unity: he acts according to what I call. . . eunuch hermeneutics” (pp. 158–59). Lee Patterson’s latest discussion of the Pardoner concludes that the notions of

eunuchry and sodomy which the text adumbrates should be read in terms of “symbolic sterility,” particularly since “in later medieval England castration as a punishment for any crime is very rare, if not in fact entirely absent” (hence at this time “the castrate or eunuch” was an altogether uncommon figure), and “sodomy, as either social practice or ideological construct, was a minor presence in Chaucer’s cultural world.” “Chaucer’s Pardoner on the Couch: Psyche and Clío in Medieval Literary Studies,” *Speculum*, 76 (2001), 638–80 (pp. 659, 660, 663–64).

209. Curry himself quotes a description by the tenth-century Arabian physician Rasis of the man who “castratus non fuit, sed sine testiculis natis vel parvissimos habens eunuchus apparet” (*Chaucer and the Medieval Sciences*, p. 59). Cf. Peter of Abano’s commentary on the pseudo-Aristotelian *Problemata*, which defines “eunuchs” as those “who lack testicles or who have small or weak ones.” *Problemata Aristotelis cum commento* (Florence, 1518), fol. 62r (on *Problemata* iv.26).

210. As Alan Fletcher has noted, the possibility that Chaucer saw the Pardoner as hermaphroditic (perhaps morally as well as medically) will repay further investigation; cf. his own sketch for a reading of this kind in “Chaucer the Heretic,” pp. 82–83.

211. Cf. the useful summary discussion of “current-day explanations and typing” by Alice Domurat Dreger, *Hermaphrodites and the Medical Invention of Sex* (Cambridge, Mass., 1998), pp. 35–40.

212. Constantine, *De coitu*, 7; in *El tratado de andrología de Constantino el Africano, Estudio y edición crítica*, ed. E. Montero Cartelle (Santiago de Compostela, 1983), pp. 106–8. That Chaucer knew something of this treatise may be inferred from his reference to it in the *Merchant’s Tale*, IV(E) 1810–11. Cf. Joan Cadden, *Meanings of Sex Difference in the Middle Ages* (Cambridge, 1993), pp. 62–63, 93, 201–5; and H. A. Kelly, “The Pardoner’s Voice, Disjunctive Narrative, and Modes of Effemination,” in Robert F. Yeager and Charlotte C. Morse (eds.), *Speaking Images: Essays in Honor of V. A. Kolve* (Asheville, N.C., 2001), pp. 411–44 (pp. 419–20). An elaborate version of the theory which prioritizes womb-position is included in the Middle English translation of *De spermate* which has survived uniquely in Cambridge, Trinity College, MS R.14.52. Here we are told that if strong male sperm flows to the chambers on the right side of the womb the child will be male, but if weak sperm flows there and is mixed with female sperm of a stronger nature, the child will be male, but “he shal be wommanly, as it is in sum men, as in wordis, in maners, and in many other thynges.” Indeed, so weak may the male sperm be that “the chield shal be of both kyndes,” i.e., a hermaphrodite. If, however, the sperm flows to the chambers on the left side, the child “shal turne into femynyne nature.” Still considering the left side, if here the sperm of man prevails over the sperm of woman, the child “may lieffully torne into wommankynde, ononly shal withhold sum manly tacchis, as generaciouns, berd, and grete wordis, etc.” Cf. Päivi Pahta, *Medieval Embryology in the Vernacular: The Case of “De spermate,”* *Mémoires de la Société Néophilologique de Helsinki*, 53 (Helsinki, 1998), pp. 173–74.

213. *Problemata*, iv.25, in *Aristotle: Problems, Books I–XXI*, ed. W. S. Hett (Cambridge, Mass., 1936), p. 127.

214. *Problemata Aristotelis cum commento*, fol. 62r.

215. *Coitus* in general seems at issue here, with such a congested condition being seen as perfectly consonant with normative heterosexuality. However, both author and commentator touch obliquely on the theory that “those with whom the semen travels to the fundament desire to be passive” sexually, whereas “those with whom it [the semen] settles in both places,” i.e., the “normal” place and the fundament, “desire to be both active and passive” in intercourse (*Problemata*, iv.25, ed. Hett, p. 129). An excellent account of Peter of Abano’s “inarticulate” and “evasive” response to this passage has been provided by Joan Cadden, “Sciences/Silences: The Natures and Languages of ‘Sodomy’ in Peter of Abano’s *Problemata* Commentary,” in K. Lochrie, P. McCracken, and J. A. Schultz (eds.), *Constructing Medieval Sexuality* (Minneapolis, 1997), pp. 40–57.

216. *De coitu*, 7, pp. 96–98. Pseudo-Aristotle had even gone so far as to suggest that bare, and hence cold, feet are bad for sexual intercourse: “the body intending sexual intercourse should be warm and moist within,” so that the semen can easily flow: *Problemata*, iv.5; ed. Hett, p. 113.

217. *Problemata*, x.42; ed. Hett, p. 231.

218. *Problemata*, iv.4; ed. Hett, pp. 111–12.

219. Cf. the remarks on Evrart and his cultural milieu in our introductory chapter.

220. This function of clear sexual differentiation is, Evrart declares, the “principal end and the greatest profit” which nature intends by the beard. If women had beards, one couldn’t sufficiently tell the difference which exists, and which should exist, between men and women by nature, from which great inconvenience (*grant inconvenient*) would follow. Boys, he continues, don’t have beards not because of any lack of natural heat and strength (which, as Avicenna says, they possess in abundance) but because of their excess of moisture. As young men become potent (*poissans*), they begin to grow beards. *Le Livre des Eschez amoureux moralisés*, ed. Françoise Guichard-Tesson and Bruno Roy, Bibliothèque du moyen français, 2 (Montreal, 1993), p. 343.

221. On the comparison between hair and feathers, see *Problemata*, iv.31; ed. Hett, p. 133.

222. *De re medicine*, ii.57, *signa eunuchi*, in *Scriptores physiognomonici Graeci et Latini*, ed. R. Foerster (Leipzig, 1893), ii.178.

223. *Mediaevalia* 8 (1982): 351–58. Green has been supported by C. David Benson, “Chaucer’s Pardoner: His Sexuality and Modern Critics,” *Mediaevalia* 8 (1982): 337–49. Green’s later article, “Further Evidence for Chaucer’s Representation of the Pardoner as a Womanizer,” *MÆ* 71 (2002), 334–36, offers additional proof that Chaucer’s contemporaries believed in the effeminizing effects of inordinate heterosexual activity. Cf. much of the material in Kelly’s study, “The Pardoner’s Voice.”

224. *The Canterbury Tales: Fifteenth-Century Continuations and Additions*, ed. John M. Bowers (Kalamazoo, Mich., 1992), pp. 60–79. Of course, the pardoner of the *Canterbury Interlude* is in many respects a very different figure from Chaucer’s; he lacks pardons, preaching, and relics. But the fact that he appears in a *fabliau* or ribald tale may be related to the Canterbury pilgrims’ initial expectation of Chaucer’s Pardoner: they expect him to tell them of “ribaudeye” and want to preempt that (VI(C) 324–26). A radical reappraisal of the relationship between the *Beryn*-poet’s pardoner and Chaucer’s has recently been offered by John Bowers, who believes that the later writer has sought to “normalize” the original character’s sexuality. “Queering the Summoner: Same-Sex Union in Chaucer’s *Canterbury Tales*,” in Yeager and Morse (eds.), *Speaking Images*, pp. 301–24 (p. 318).

225. Here I am thinking particularly of the function of the pardoner’s staff in the *Tale of Beryn*. Perhaps the poet got the idea from the pilgrim’s staff wielded by Amant at the end of the *Roman de la Rose*, which features prominently in Jean de Meun’s allegory of the impregnation of the virgin Rose. But the pun is obvious enough and no doubt could have been generated without French influence. The pardoner gives his staff to the “tapstere” Kit at the beginning of the tale, and subsequently demands its return, whereupon Kit’s lover—clearly the dominant male here—beats him with it. The symbolism of phallic prowess is blatant.

226. Judith Butler, *Bodies that Matter* (New York, 1993), p. 228.

227. *De coitu* (Basel, 1585), pp. 307–8; cf. Yves Ferroul, “Abelard’s Blissful Castration,” in Jeffrey J. Cohen and Bonnie Wheeler (eds.), *Becoming Male in the Middle Ages* (New York, 1997), pp. 129–49 (p. 141).

228. From the B-version of his commentary on Constantine’s *Viaticum*; see Mary Frances Wack, *Lovesickness in the Middle Ages: The “Viaticum” and Its Commentaries* (Philadelphia, 1990), pp. 234–37. According to Aristotle the testicles are not necessary for generation; he thought that “they play only an external role in the emission of semen, a role that was not essential and could be missing.” Galen, however, saw them as essential, “as a place in which the already produced semen could be further elaborated and prepared for its generative role.” See Aidan McGrath, *A Controversy concerning Male Impotence*, *Analecta Gregoriana*, 247, Series Facultatis Iuris Canonici, sectio B, n. 49 (Rome, 1988), p. 32.

229. As, for example, Dinshaw, *Chaucer’s Sexual Poetics*, pp. 165–68, and H. Marshall Leicester, *The Disenchanted Self: Representing the Subject in the Canterbury Tales* (Berkeley, 1990), p. 411.

230. Yves Ferroul, “Abelard’s Blissful Castration,” p. 136.

231. Cf. Chaucer’s formulations of the two causes, in the *Wife of Bath’s Prologue*, III(D) 126–28, and the *Parson’s Tale*, X(I) 919, and our relevant discussion in Chapter 4 below.

232. Cf. McGrath, *Controversy*, p. 57.

233. Cf. McGrath, *Controversy*. This impressively learned study takes its point of departure from the brief *Cum frequenter* of Pope Sixtus V (27 June 1587). In Spain some eunuchs and spadones who lacked both testicles were getting married and claiming the right to do so; “they based this claim on their alleged capacity for the act of intercourse which

they had discovered during illicit [i.e., extra-marital] relations with women” (McGrath, *Controversy*, p. 19). So the Nuncio had asked the Pope’s advice. The response was that without the production of true seed a man is impotent and incapable of contracting marriage. McGrath seeks to reconcile this with the Decree of the Sacred Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith of 13 May 1977, which holds that “ejaculation of semen elaborated in the testicles is not required for true marital intercourse” (p. 5).

234. *Rosarium decretorum*, pars 2, C. 32, qu. 7, c. 25 (Venice, 1481), unfol.

235. *Remissorius, qui posterior est tomus commentariorum in Gratiani Decreta*, C. 32, qu. 7, 6a pars (Lyon, 1550), fols. 55v–56r.

236. *Summa de poenitentia et matrimonii*, De matrimonio, lib. iv, tit. 16, 3 (p. 560). Cf. the discussion in McGrath, *Controversy*, pp. 70, 85–86.

237. *Summa aurea*, lib. iv: *de frigidis etc.* (Lyon, 1568), fols. 260v–61r.

238. *In quartum Sententiarum*, lib. 1, dist. 34, qu. 1, art. 2 (Venice, 1575), ii.246; cf. McGrath, *Controversy*, pp. 94–97.

239. *Summa Decreti*, quoted from Vatican Library, MS Vat. Lat. 2280, fol. 288v, by McGrath, *Controversy*, p. 69, cf. p. 86.

240. Cf. McGrath, *Controversy*, pp. 67–68.

241. *De sacrorum hominum continentia*, lib. V, c. 77 (Venice, 1569), p. 498.

242. *De sacramentis novae legis tabulae perutiles*, De matrimonio, cap. 19, n. 1 (Rimini, 1587), fols. 127v–8r.

243. *In quartum Sententiarum*, dist. 34, qu. 2, art. 1 (Venice, 1493), fol. 170v.

244. *Summae sacrae theologiae, pars tertia*, lib. 1, cap. 12, 2 (Venice, 1571), fol. 12v.

245. *In IV Sent.*, dist. XXVII, art. 2, qu. 3 (iv.416–17).

246. The suspicion that in such discussions we are dealing with merely hypothetical debating points, very far from reality, is easily dispelled by consideration of actual church court records concerning impotence as an “impediment” to marriage. For examples, see Jacqueline Murray, “On the Origins and Role of ‘Wise Women’ in Cases for Annulment on the Grounds of Male Impotence,” *Journal of Medieval History*, 16 (1990), 235–49; P. J. P. Goldberg (ed.), *Women in England, c. 1275–1525: Documentary Sources* (Manchester, 1995), pp. 219–22; Frederik Pedersen, *Marriage Disputes in Medieval England* (London, 2000), pp. 115–18. See further Catherine Rider, *Magic and Impotence in the Middle Ages* (Oxford, 2006), which includes discussion of how magic figured in legal attempts to resolve accusations of impotence.

247. Donald R. Howard, *The Idea of the Canterbury Tales* (Berkeley, 1976), pp. 344–45. Howard wishes to maintain the status of the Pardoner as “a mystery, an enigma— sexually anomalous, hermaphroditic, menacing, contradictory.”

248. Glenn Burger and Steven F. Kruger (eds.), *Queering the Middle Ages* (Minneapolis, 2001), p. xvii.

249. Cf. Patterson, “Chaucer’s Pardoner on the Couch,” p. 661.

250. Ed. by Charles H. Livingston, *Le Jongleur Gautier le Leu: Étude sur les fabliaux* (Cambridge, Mass., 1951), pp. 178–79.

251. McAlpine uses this poem also, but in a (free and misleading) different translation and to a different end; “The Pardoner’s Homosexuality,” pp. 12–13. I am grateful to David Hult for valuable discussion of the poem’s difficult opening lines, and here draw on the translation of Robert Hellman and Richard O’Gorman, conveniently reprinted in *The Canterbury Tales: Nine Tales and the General Prologue*, ed. V. A. Kolve and Glending Olson (New York, 1989), pp. 320–26.

252. *The Canterbury Tales*, ed. Kolve and Olson, p. 324.

253. On which see further Chapter 4 below.

254. Here I follow the report “A Tale of Sex and Violence” published in *The Guardian* (10 November 2001), *The Editor*, p. 5.

255. To state the obvious (which nevertheless bears constant statement and acting upon): it is perfectly possible—and ethically preferable—to name the evils which men do without implicating other activities that have no necessary causal relationship with them.

256. This approach finds much support in the arguments of Benson and Green (cited in n. 223) above. See also Green’s later article, “The Pardoner’s Pants (and Why They Matter),” *SAC* 15 (1993), 131–45, where it is suggested that the Host’s reference to his adversary’s dirty breeches (vi(C) 948–49) recalls a popular *fabliau* narrative wherein a friar or some other lecherous clergyman cuckolds a husband who then discovers his discarded trousers;

the wife's honor is saved when this garment is taken to be the relic of a saint. See further my forthcoming article, "Once More into the Breech: The Pardoner's Prize *Relyk*."

257. *Riverside Chaucer*, ed. Benson et al., p. 34 (gloss on l. 691).

258. *Medieval Latin Poems of Male Love and Friendship*, ed. and tr. Thomas Stehling (New York, 1984), pp. 80–81; the parallel was noted by Jill Mann, *Chaucer and Medieval Estates Satire* (Cambridge, 1973), p. 146.

259. "Chaucer's Pardoner," p. 343.

260. Though at *Miller's Tale*, I(A), 3769, Chaucer uses "gerl" to refer to a young woman, the term could designate a child of either sex: see the *MED*, s.v. *girl(e)*; cf. Morton Bloomfield, "Chaucer's Summoner and the Girls of the Diocese," *Philological Quarterly*, 28 (1949), 503–7. Given the "concubyn" reference (I(A) 650), young women could well be meant at I(A) 664. Alternatively, understood as designating both genders together, "yonge girls" might be intended to signal the indiscriminating—and hence revoltingly excessive—nature of the Summoner's lust.

261. *The Works of Sir John Clanvowe*, ed. V. I. J. Scattergood (Cambridge, 1975), pp. 71–72.

262. "Queering the Summoner," p. 305. Such confident recognition is hardly supported by the minimal mention of sodomy in late-medieval English church and civic court records. This does not mean, of course, that same-sex relations did not exist but simply that they "remained outside public discourse, below the documentary radar," as McSheffrey nicely puts it in her discussion of the problems of interpreting such "silence"; *Marriage, Sex, and Civic Culture*, pp. 148–50. There are, to be sure, exceptions: see David Lorenzo Boyd and Ruth Mazo Karras, "'Ut cum muliere': A Male Transvestite Prostitute in Fourteenth Century London," in Louise Fradenburg and Louise Freccero (eds.), *Premodern Sexualities* (London, 1996), pp. 99–116.

263. Bowers, "Queering the Summoner," p. 302. Cf. the way in which Peter Damian (in his *Liber Gomorrhianus*) "treats sodomitical desire as a matter of choice," a "temptation to which all flesh is vulnerable, especially all masculine flesh," as is well brought out by Larry Scanlon, "Unmanned Men and Eunuchs of God: Peter Damian's *Liber Gomorrhianus* and the Sexual Politics of Papal Reform," *New Medieval Literatures*, 2 (1998), 37–64 (p. 53).

264. William of Nassington's authorship of this Middle English "moral encyclopaedia" (in popularity and breadth of dissemination second only to the *Pricke of Conscience*) is quite plausible but not established beyond all doubt. See Ingrid J. Peterson, *William of Nassington: Canon, Mystic, and Poet of the "Speculum Vitae"* (New York, 1986). Having served as a church lawyer in Exeter, Nassington was appointed in 1354 as ecclesiastical official and visitor at York by Archbishop William de la Zouche.

265. Other accounts of the fourteen branches of lechery, in the *Somme le Roi* tradition, include *Ayenbite of Inwyte*, ed. Morris and Gradon, pp. 48–49; *Vices and Virtues*, ed. Francis, pp. 44–46; *Myroure*, ed. Nelson, pp. 165–67.

266. Quoted from *William of Nassington, Speculum vitae*, compiled by Christine Robinson, consulted via the Oxford Text Archive, on <http://ota.ahds.ac.uk>. Reproduced with Dr. Robinson's permission. The punctuation in this and the following quotation is my own.

267. *De regimine principum*, iv.14, in *Aquinatis opera*, xvi.281.

268. English text in *Selections from English Wycliffite Writings*, ed. Hudson, p. 25; for the Latin version, see the *Fasciculi zizaniorum*, pp. 360–69. See further the excellent discussion in Carolyn Dinshaw, *Getting Medieval: Sexualities and Communities, Pre-and Postmodern* (Durham, N.C., 1999), pp. 57–99.

269. *Cleanness*, ed. J. J. Anderson (Manchester, 1977), pp. 33–45. The same attitudes pervade the ridiculously trumped-up charges brought against the French Knights Templar in 1307. For example, it was said they had been encouraged to practise sodomy, the better to keep their vow of abstinence from sex with women. Cf. Helen Nicholson, *The Knights Templar: A New History* (Thrupp, Stroud, 2001), pp. 205–6, and Evelyn Lord, *The Knights Templar in Britain* (Harlow, 2002), pp. 187–89, 197.

270. On this topic, in addition to Bowers's remarks, see especially the relevant comment in Carol J. Clover, "Regardless of Sex: Men, Women and Power in Early Northern Europe," *Speculum*, 67 (1993), 363–87.

271. Williams, *Roman Homosexuality*, pp. 4–5.

272. Cf. n. 203 above; also Williams, *Roman Homosexuality*, p. 6.

273. Bristow, *Sexuality*, p. 215.

274. Cf. the relevant comments in my introductory chapter.

275. "Kissing the Pardoner," *PMLA* 107 (1992), 1143–73. Here the "open secret" of the Pardoner's supposed homosexuality is challengingly connected to another such secret, the popular demand for quick "spiritual fixes" as obtained (Burger believes) by highly rewarding pilgrimages to merely local sites and easily gained indulgences of vast power and promise.

276. "The Pardoner's Tale, the Pervert, and the Price of Order in Chaucer's World," in Britton J. Harwood and Gillian R. Overing (eds.), *Class and Gender in Early English Literature: Intersections* (Bloomington, Ind., 1994), 131–47.

277. *Chaucer's Pardoner and Gender Theory: Bodies of Discourse* (New York, 2000).

278. McAlpine, "The Pardoner's Homosexuality," p. 14.

279. "The Pardoner's Homosexuality," p. 15, cf. p. 18; see further Dinshaw, *Getting Medieval*, pp. 5–12, 70, 72, 101, 105 (and p. 208 n. 6 for an interesting distinction between "unspeakable" and "unspoken"). Sodomy is described in the *Parson's Tale*, X(I) 909–10 as "thilke abhomynable synne of which that no man unnethe oghte speke ne write." Some recent scholarship takes the view that objectively there was little to speak or write about, sodomy being "a minor presence in Chaucer's cultural world," to cite Patterson once more; cf. his discussion and references in "Chaucer's Pardoner on the Couch," pp. 662–64.

280. Chobham, *Summa praedicandi*, p. 24. For these reasons, I am out of sympathy with McAlpine's desire to see some "signs of spiritual life" in the "Pardoner's manipulation of relics and pardons." "The Pardoner's Homosexuality," p. 18.

281. "The Pardoner's Homosexuality," p. 16.

282. Here we may recall the way in which John Capgrave lists, with enthusiasm, the indulgences on offer at the seven altars of "principal auctorite" in St. Peter's, Rome. The visitor is granted "tociens quociens uii 3ere indulgens. In þe fest of þe anunciacioun of our lady who so euer visite þis cherch hath of indulgens a ml 3ere, on maunde þursdayaml 3ere. In euery feest of seynt petir a ml 3ere. In þe dedicacioun of þe cherch which fallith in þe octaue of seynt martyn uii ml 3ere & þe þirde past remissioun of all synne. Whenne so euyr þe uernacle is schewed iii ml 3ere is graunted to þe romanes. And to hem all þat dwelle ouyr þe mowntis ix ml 3ere. And to þoo þat dwelle þe þishalue þe mowntis xii ml 3er." *Ye Solace of Pilgrimes*, ed. Mills, p. 63. On the "uernacle" or veronica—apparently visited by Chaucer's Pardoner—see pp. 3, 100, 388–89n above. It is true that around this time *curiositas* was being acknowledged as one motivation for pilgrimage. Capgrave himself notes that even the great Master Plato was not ashamed to "be a pilgrime for to lerne straunge þingis namely in straunge cuntrees"; the following record of his own experiences ("swech straunge sitis as I haue seyn and swech straunge þingis as I haue herd") is thereby justified (p. 1). But the motive of religious self-improvement continued to dominate. On this topic, see especially Christian K. Zacher, *Curiosity and Pilgrimage: The Literature of Discovery in Fourteenth-Century England* (Baltimore, 1976).

283. *Geschichte des Ablasses im Mittelalter vom Ursprunge bis zur Mitte des 14. Jahrhunderts* (Paderborn, 1922–23).

284. There are, however, important exceptions. See especially Swanson, "Letters of Confraternity and Indulgence," who affirms that "a strong case can be made to show a positive side to indulgences, as a positive facet of late medieval English religion" (p. 41). Nicholas Orme comments, "Like many well-known pictures of the past, . . . the tarnished image of indulgences is not altogether accurate. The theory on which they were based was perfectly rational, and their operation in practice was often equally respectable": "Indulgences in the Diocese of Exeter, 1100–1536," *Report and Transactions of the Devonshire Association for the Advancement of Science, Literature and Art*, 120 (1988), 15–32 (p. 15). In similar vein, Nicholas Vincent claims that the indulgence "deserves to be regarded not as some archaic monument to theological folly, but as something far more central to the concerns of the twelfth-century Church"; "Some Pardoner's Tales," p. 58. It would seem that a revisionist history of indulgences is beginning to emerge, the most substantial testimony to which is the recently published collection of essays edited by R. N. Swanson, *Promissory Notes on the Treasury of Merits: Indulgences in Late Medieval Europe* (Leiden, 2006). And Robert Shaffern's ongoing research is bringing out well the complexity of the relevant theology, its intellectual sophistication and devotional appeal as well as its material perils and pitfalls; cf. his articles as cited in our previous chapter, and his forthcoming book, *The Penitents' Treasury: Indulgences in the High Middle Ages* (Scranton, Pa., 2007).

285. Indeed, Lee Patterson's important 2001 study implies that Lollard criticism of

indulgences is the only contemporary view of significance for an understanding of the Pardoner's profession; "Chaucer's Pardoner on the Couch," pp. 664–65. The fact that much of that criticism was deemed heretical—mad or bad, certainly dangerous to know—is occluded. True, "'Conservative Lollardy' is sometimes very close to 'radical orthodoxy,'" as Anne Hudson says, *Premature Reformation*, p. 279 (quoted by Patterson). But—to take one example—the belief that "merchandising indulgences is simoniacal" (Patterson, p. 664) went far beyond the boundaries of orthodoxy, however "radical," and was consistently condemned in Chaucer's day. The great thirteenth-century theologians, including Saints Bonaventure and Thomas Aquinas, had demonstrated at some length that the practice was not *inherently* simoniacal. There is no evidence that Chaucer had any problem with the long-established and widespread practice of issuing indulgences; what does seem to have concerned him was the corruption of that system by real-life figures who were all too like his Pardoner.

286. *The Portiuncula Indulgence, from Honorius III to Pius XI*, Franciscan Studies 19 (New York, 1938), p. 1.

287. Huber, *The Portiuncula Indulgence*, p. 194.

288. On this matter, the Protestant churches have a long memory. The World Alliance of Reformed Churches withdrew its delegate from the Central Committee for the 2000 Jubilee because its papal bull of indiction (*Incarnationis mysterium*, issued 29 November 1999) included a summary of Pope Paul VI's views on indulgences. Cf. Palmer and Tavad, "Indulgences." The authors of this article in the 2003 *New Catholic Encyclopedia* state that indulgences are "clearly not a necessary part of authentic Christian life," note their absence in the penitential practice of the oriental churches, and predict "further reappraisal of the advisability of the practice . . . in the future."

289. Dinshaw, *Chaucer's Sexual Poetics*, p. 167.

290. Here I apply the terms of Chobham's disquisition in his *Summa praedicandi*, ed. Morenzoni, p. 26. The same point is made by Robert of Basevorn; cf. pp. 52–53 above.

291. To borrow a phrase from Bowers, "Queering the Summoner," p. 301.

292. These were preserved in a shrine erected behind the altar. On the north side of the choir hundreds of other relics were on display, in their ivory, gilt, or silver coffers. In his thinly fictionalized account of his visit to Canterbury (made during the period between late 1512 and the summer of 1514) Erasmus recounts how a large quantity of bones was brought before his party, "skulls, jaws, teeth, hands, fingers, whole arms; all of which we adored and kissed." However, his companion "Gratian Pullus" (to be identified with John Colet) looked "rather disgusted" when he was presented with an arm "with the bloodstained flesh" still attached, and shrank from kissing it. *Opera omnia Desiderii Erasmi Roterodami*, i.3 (Amsterdam, 1972), pp. 487–88; tr. C. R. Thompson, *Collected Works of Erasmus: Colloquies*, xl (Toronto, 1997), pp. 642–43. Erasmus claimed later that he was drawing attention "to those who exhibit doubtful relics for authentic ones, who attribute to them more than is proper, and basely make money by them"; *De utilitate colloquiorum*; *Opera omnia*, i.3, p. 743; tr. Thompson, *Collected Works of Erasmus: Colloquies*, xl, p. 1104. In contrast, the authenticity and valence of the relics which await Chaucer's fictional pilgrims at Canterbury are never called in question; there is no suggestion whatever that the spiritual treasures of Becket's shrine are in any way "doubtful" or have more attributed to them than is proper. Rather, something of the disgust felt by "Pullus" pervades Chaucer's attack on the spurious relics which the Pardoner carries and exploits for material gain (I(A) 699–703; VI(C) 347–84, 943–55).

293. Furthermore, it is possible to detect a specific instance of travesty in the Host's statement that the Pardoner is the kind of man who would make him kiss his "olde breech," swearing that it was "a relyk of a seint / Though it were with thy fundement depeint!" (VI(C) 949–50). This may recall the famous relic of Becket's breeches, which is mentioned, together with his hair shirt, by Erasmus, *Opera omnia*, i.3, 487; tr. Thompson, p. 642. See Daniel Knapp, "The Relic of a Saint: A Gloss on Chaucer's Pilgrimage," *English Literary History*, 39 (1972), 1–26, and Green, "The Pardoner's Pants."

294. Cf. Sumption, *Pilgrimage*, p. 157.

295. Benedict, *Miracula Sancti Thomae Cantuariensis*, in *Materials for the History of Becket*, ed. Robertson, ii.28.

296. *A Relation, or Rather a True Account, of the Island of England; with Sundry Particulars of the Customs of these People and of the Royal Revenues under the King Henry the Seventh, about the year 1500*, ed. Charlotte A. Sneyd, Camden Old Series, 37 (London, 1847), p. 30. Cf.

Sumption, *Pilgrimage*, pp. 154–55. See further Erasmus's description, *Opera omnia*, i.3, 490; tr. Thompson, pp. 645, 671n. The church itself is said to rise "to the sky so majestically that it inspires devotion even in those who see it from afar"; *Opera omnia*, i.3, 486; tr. Thompson, p. 641. The early testimonies are conveniently collected together in Sarah Blick's splendid article, "Reconstructing the Shrine of St. Thomas Becket, Canterbury Cathedral," in Blick and Tekippe (eds.), *Art and Architecture of Late Medieval Pilgrimage*, pp. 405–41 (pp. 405–12).

297. Nilson, *Cathedral Shrines*, p. 188; A. P. Stanley, *Historical Memorials of Canterbury*, 12th ed. (London, 1891), pp. 193, 223–24, 244. The "Regale of France" may have ended up in a ring worn by King Henry VIII.

298. Benedict, *Passio Sancti Thomae Cantuariensis*, frag. X; *Materials for the History of Becket*, ed. Robertson, ii.18–19.

299. The production of small *ampullae* of "Becket's blood" had ceased by the end of the thirteenth century, and so they could not have been bought by pilgrims in Chaucer's day. I am grateful to Sarah Blick for her help here (personal communication). Pilgrimage souvenirs were sold at Canterbury for more than three hundred years, from 1171 until the 1530s. "No other shrine in England or Europe matched Canterbury's production of pilgrim souvenirs, in terms of variety, quantity, and quality"; cf. Sarah Blick, "Comparing Pilgrim Souvenirs and Trinity Chapel Windows at Canterbury Cathedral," *Mirror* (September 2001), pp. 1–27 (p. 23 n. 38). See further Webb, *Pilgrimage in Medieval England*, pp. 47–49.

300. G. L. Kittredge, *Chaucer and His Poetry* (Cambridge, Mass., 1915), pp. 21, 180.

301. Cf. Lee Patterson's reading, which links the Pardoner's acknowledgment of the "values he subverts in his working" with the suggestion that "he is by no means as unambiguously impenitent as he claims"; *Chaucer and the Subject of History* (Madison, Wis., 1991), p. 400. But the evidence from scholastic theology would seem to suggest that this link is neither a necessary nor a compelling one.

302. For more in this vein, see Derek Pearsall, "Chaucer's Pardoner: The Death of a Salesman," *ChR* 17 (1983), 358–65.

303. To take one representative discussion, Thomas of Bailly fully endorsed St. Gregory's dictum that a preacher whose words differ from his actions plants a seed which another eats, even though he himself does not feed on this seed. Bailly does explore the possibility that an immoral person who benefits others may merit *de congruo*, for example by giving alms or indeed by preaching (providing he does not scandalize his audience, obviously). But two important caveats must be entered. First, Bailly thinks of such a person as being motivated by natural piety to preach to others and by feelings of attrition (markedly inferior to contrition) concerning his wrongdoing. I can find no evidence of either in Chaucer's presentation of his Pardoner. Second, merit *de congruo* is an inferior form of merit, which—unlike the superior form, merit *de condigno*—does not cry out to be rewarded. That is to say, withholding reward for congruent merit does not involve any violation of right; in such a case it is largely a matter of how generous the rewarder (i.e., God) decides to be, and of course He can be as generous or as punitive as He wishes. In sum, even if Chaucer's character *did* have some feelings of natural piety or attrition, that would not necessarily earn or purchase any part of Jesus Christ's "pardon," affect his status as a "lost soul." Any reward he might theoretically receive is entirely up to God; the Pardoner himself has done little if anything to further his case—and much to diminish it. *Pace* Kittredge and Patterson, there are no apparent grounds for optimism concerning his redemption. If this despicable figure has no sympathy for his fellow-Christians, why should God have any sympathy for him? Here I draw on Bailly's *Quodlibet* iv, qu. 13, ed. Glorieux, pp. 319–24 (cf. n. 128 above), clarifying his doctrine with Aquinas's explanations of some of the technical terms involved.

304. The difference has been noticed by G. H. Gerould, "The Vicious Pardoner," in his *Chaucerian Essays* (Princeton, 1952), pp. 55–71 (p. 60), and of course by Kelly, "The Pardoner's Voice."

305. Here I am in total agreement with the relevant argument in Kelly's article, "The Pardoner's Voice."

306. In the *Parson's Tale*, X(I) 909–10, sodomy is referred to as "abhomyneable synne," but there is nothing distinctive or exclusive about this use of the adjective. In the *Pardoner's Tale* "superfluytee abhomyneable" (471) collectively designates the excesses of the riotous young folk of Flanders, and great swearing is termed "a thyng abhominable" (631). In the *Pardoner's Prologue*, "synne horrible" (379) refers vaguely to all the particularly bad sins of which a "wight" might be ashamed. Here the pronoun "he" indicates that the wight is male;

in Heywood's largely verbatim borrowing of these lines in *The Pardoner and the Frere* the "he" becomes "she" (174–76), and "syn horryble" designates a range of sins committed by women. Furthermore, in a particularly interesting passage in his *Liber contra XII errores et hereses lollardorum* (ed. Cronin, pp. 287–90), Roger Dymmok attributes to the Lollards the belief that sins against nature are the most horrible (*horribile*), and denies that this is the case. In fact, he asserts, many spiritual sins and some corporeal sins are more horrible than the *peccata carnalia innaturalia* which Wycliffites believe should be avoided by means of clerical marriage (cf. our discussion of this specific matter in Chapter 4 below). For example, murder is worse, as is abortion, and the suffocation of infants before they can be baptized.

CHAPTER 3. *De impedimento sexus*

1. My chapter title deploys a heading found in (for example) the *summae* of the canon lawyers Raymond of Peñafort and John of Freiburg; cf. Peter Biller, “Cathars and Material Women,” in Peter Biller and Alastair Minnis (eds.), *Medieval Theology and the Natural Body* (York, 1997), pp. 61–107 (pp. 68–69, notes 25 and 26).

2. “Look at Walter Brut—whom they pursue busily, for he spoke the truth to them. And yet, sir, furthermore, they may harm him no more. But it is said that he is a heretic and believes what is evil, and preaches it from the pulpit to blind the people. They want to curse that creature for his good deeds, and so they chew up charity just like dogs chew chaff.” *The Piers Plowman Tradition*, ed. Helen Barr (London, 1993), p. 89.

3. *Registrum Johannis Trefnant*, ed. Capes, p. 364, no. 30; passage tr. by Margaret Aston, “Lollard Women Priests?” in her *Lollards and Reformers*, pp. 49–70 (p. 52).

4. See the edition by A. Blamires and C. W. Marx, “Woman Not to Preach: A Disputation in British Library MS Harley 31,” *Journal of Medieval Latin*, 3 (1993), 34–63, and the partial translation by C. W. Marx in Alcuin Blamires (ed.), *Woman Defamed and Woman Defended* (Oxford, 1997), pp. 251–55.

5. One of the consequences of the Gregorian Reform movement of the eleventh and twelfth centuries was a hardening of the distinction between the clergy and the laity, a process of segregation which was furthered by successive church councils. As Gary Macy’s work has made quite clear, this resulted in a narrowing of the concept of ecclesiastical “ordination,” the privileges of women within the Western Christian Church thereby being reduced. Up until the end of twelfth century, “abbots, abbesses, deaconesses, nuns, monks, emperors, empresses, kings and queens” were considered sacramentally ordained, just as were priests, despite the obvious differences in function and role. But this history was erased, and a new one constructed, with the schoolmen quoted in the following discussion making a major contribution. Cf. Macy’s essays, “The Ordination of Women in the Early Middle Ages” (2000), rpt. in Bernard Cooke and Gary Macy (eds.), *A History of Women and Ordination*, vol. 1: *The Ordination of Women in Medieval Context* (Lanham, Md., 2002), pp. 1–30 (esp. pp. 8–9); “The ‘Invention’ of Clergy and Laity in the Twelfth Century,” in M. H. Barnes and W. P. Roberts (eds.), *A Sacramental Life: A Festschrift Honoring Bernard Cooke* (Milwaukee, 2003), pp. 117–35 (esp. p. 119); “Heloise, Abelard and the Ordination of Abbesses,” *Journal of Ecclesiastical History*, 57, no. 1 (2006), 1–17; and especially his forthcoming monograph, *The Hidden History of the Ordination of Women: Female Clergy in the Medieval West* (Oxford, 2007).

6. *In IV Sent.*, dist. XXV, art. 2, qu. 1 (*Utrum ad susceptionem ordinis requiratur sexus virilis*); *Bonaventurae opera*, iv.649–51.

7. *In IV Sent.*, dist. XXV, qu. 2, art. 1 (*Utrum femineus impediatur ordinis susceptionem*); *Aquinatis opera*, vii.2.907–8.

8. *In IV Sent.* dist. XXV, qu. 3, art. 1 (*An sexus muliebris impediatur susceptionem ordinis*); iv.278–79.

9. *In IV Sent.* dist. XXV, qu. 2 (*Utrum sexus muliebris, vel aetas puerilis, impediatur susceptionem ordinis*); *Scoti opera*, xi.2.783–85.

10. *In IV Sent.*, dist. XXV, qu. 2 (*Utrum mulier vel puer possit ordinari*); ii.364v.

11. *In IV Sent.* dist. XXV, qu. 3 (*De impedimentis ordinis*) (Paris ed., i, fols. 134r–v). This discussion is heavily dependent on the earlier treatment of the same issue by Durandus, a thinker whom Peter attacked on other fronts. For their intellectual relationship see Jean Dunbabin, *A Hound of God: Pierre de la Palud and the Fourteenth-Century Church* (Oxford, 1991), pp. 36–42.

12. Richard’s *Sentences* commentary, produced during the period 1241–48, was the first to issue from Oxford. His discussion of the non-ordination of women (which has been edited from two manuscripts by Martin, “Ordination of Women,” pp. 52–54, 119–20), was followed by his Oxford successor, Simon of Hinton O.P., in the *Summa theologiae* which he wrote 1254/6. See Martin, “Ordination of Women,” pp. 54–55, who also picks up a relevant statement in the *Sentences* commentary which the English Dominican William of Rothwell produced around 1255 (p. 55).

13. *In IV Sent.*, dist. XXV, art. 4, qu. 1: *Utrum sexus muliebris impedit ordinis susceptionem* (iv.388–89).

14. Francis studied at Paris, probably under Duns Scotus; he became a master of theology in 1323. Francis's very brief comments on the female sex as an impediment to ordination form part of the question "*Utrum cuilibet fidei possit conferri sacramentum ordinis*"; In *IV Sent.*, dist. XXV, qu. 3, *Scriptum luculentissimum in quantum sententiarum* (Venice, 1507), fol. 41v.

15. *Opera in quatuor sententiarum libros aurea* (Paris, 1516–17), ii, fols. 105r–6v. The relevant comments (which are heavily dependent on Scotus's treatment) form part of a *quaestio unica* entitled *Utrum pena canonica vel etas puerilis vel sex muliebris impediatur ab executione vel ministratione seu receptione ordinum*.

16. A master of theology at Paris in 1337, Thomas composed his *Sentences* commentary there c. 1335/7. In *IV Sent.*, dist. XXV, conclusio secunda (*quod ordinatus sit sexus masculini, hoc est de necessitate sacramenti*); In *lib. Sent.*, fols. 142v–3r.

17. Eustace's text is edited by Leclercq, "Le Magistère," pp. 119–20.

18. *Summa quaest. ord.* (Paris ed., i, fols. 77v–8r, 83v–4v). The first of these questions has been reprinted (after the two early printed editions) by Blamires and Marx, "Woman Not to Preach," pp. 50–55.

19. *Sent. IV*, dist. I, cap. 2; Lombard, *Lib. sent.* (ii.232). Cf. also Thomas Aquinas, *Summa theologiae*, 3a, qu. 60, art. 1 (Ivi.5).

20. *Sent. IV*, dist. I, cap. 3; Lombard, *Lib. sent.* (ii.233). Fundamentally, a "sacrament" may be understood as "any symbol or ritual that God chose to mediate salvation to humans"; cf. the cogent definition of Bernard Cooke and Gary Macy, *Christian Symbol and Ritual: An Introduction* (Oxford, 2005), p. 38. However, late-medieval theologians came to hold quite rigid views concerning which symbols or rituals God had chosen for the purpose of mediation.

21. *Sent. IV*, dist. I, cap. 4; Lombard, *Lib. sent.* (ii.233).

22. *Summa theologiae*, 3a, qu. 60, art. 2 (Ivi.9).

23. *Summa theologiae*, 3a, qu. 60, art. 2, ad 3 (Ivi.11).

24. *Summa theologiae*, 3a, qu. 60, art. 4 (Ivi.15).

25. *Summa theologiae*, 3a, qu. 60, art. 5 (Ivi.19).

26. *Sup. lib. IV Sent.*, p. 389.

27. *Scoti opera*, xi.2.784. Repeated by Scotus's ardent follower John of Bassoles, In *quat. sent. libros aurea*, ii, fol. 106v.

28. In *Sent. comm.*, fol. 364v. Followed by Peter of la Palud, In *quart. Sent.*, fol. 134r.

29. *Scoti opera*, xi.2.785.

30. This argument assumes that the effect is not dependent on forces outside the species. The fundamental point of Duns's subsequent counterargument is that, in the case of ordination, the effect is dependent on a force beyond the human species, namely God.

31. A very different argument from the common species of man and women figures in the anti-Brut *quaestiones*; see pp. 211, 236–37 below.

32. A succinct and slightly different version of this argument is offered by Thomas of Strasbourg (*Comm. in Sent.*, fols. 142v–3r). When, by a certain rationale, an agent produces an effect in one member of a species it can produce it in another member of the same species. But man and woman are of the same species; therefore the rationale in question allows a bishop to confer the sacrament of holy orders on a woman as much as on a man. In dismissing this view, Thomas notes that the *ordinatio* of a principal agent can determine an instrumental agent in respect of one of the recipients but not of another. As far as the bestowing of the *character*, or power, in question is concerned, a bishop is the instrument of God, disposing extrinsically according to the divine plan the masculine sex, and not the feminine, for the reception of the aforesaid power.

33. *Bonaventurae opera*, iv.649.

34. *Decretum*, 2a pars, causa 33, qu. 8, C. 19, in *Corpus iuris canonici*, ed. Friedberg, i, 1255–56.

35. *Bonaventurae opera*, iv.650.

36. *Summa theologiae*, 1a, qu. 92, art. 1 (xiii.37–39). For Bonaventure's views on such issues see further P. L. Reynolds, "Bonaventure on Gender and Godlikeness," *The Downside Review*, 364 (1988), 171–94.

37. *Summa theologiae*, 1a, qu. 93, art. 6 (xiii.69–71).

38. *Summa theologiae*, 1a, qu. 92, art. 1, ad 2um (xiii.38–39).

39. *Summa theologiae*, 1a, qu. 93, art. 4, ad 1um (xiii.60–61).

40. *Corpus iuris canonici in tres partes distinctum, glossis diversorum illustratum* (Lyons,

1671), i, col. 1825. See further the relevant quotations and discussion in Ida Raming, *Exclusion of Women*, pp. 94–97. The original German monograph from which this book derives, *Der Ausschluss der Frau vom priesterlichen Amt: gottgewollte Tradition oder Diskriminierung?* was published in Cologne in 1973.

41. Hostiensis, *Commentaria in quinque libros decretalium* (Venice, 1581; rpt. Turin, 1963), i, col. 173r–v. Cf. Raming, *Exclusion of Women*, pp. 134, 153 n. 96.

42. Hugutio, *Summa decreti*, as transcribed from Munich, Clm 10247, fol. 266r, by Raming, *Exclusion of Women*, p. 114 n. 161; cf. pp. 91–92. For the tradition that Eve was created in the likeness (*similitudo*) but not the image (*imago*) of God see especially Marie-Thérèse d'Alverny, “Comment les théologiens et les philosophes voient la femme,” *Cahiers de civilisation médiévale*, 20 (1977), 105–29.

43. *Bonaventurae opera*, iv.650. This aspect of Bonaventure's argument is emphasized by J. Razette, “Le sacerdoce et la femme chez Saint Bonaventure,” *Antonianum* 51 (1976), 520–27.

44. I.e., the special mark or imprint of ordination, as explained previously.

45. Martin, “Ordination of Women,” p. 64. Cf. Razette, who explains that for Bonaventure “les réalités sacramentelles ne sont pas purement spirituelles, mais qu'elles ont toujours un rapport avec le corps par le truchement du signe visible” (p. 526).

46. What, then, of the hermaphrodite? If the male sex predominates, in theory such a person may be ordained, though in practice “his” deformity may prohibit this. However, if the female sex predominates, s/he may not. Behind this lies the influence of Roman law, which held that only a hermaphrodite with mainly male attributes could be a witness in a will or in a court. For discussion see Raming, *The Exclusion of Women*, pp. 91, 113 n. 159, 94, 117 n. 182, etc.

47. *Aquinatis opera*, vii.2.908.

48. Martin, “Ordination of Women,” p. 66.

49. *Comment. in Sent.*, fol. 143r.

50. *In III Sent.*, dist. XII, art. 3, qu. 1; *Bonaventurae opera*, iii.270.

51. *Summa theologiae*, 3a, qu. 31, art. 4 (lii.23).

52. *Scoti opera*, xi.2.784–75.

53. The term *ordo* recurs throughout the treatments I am discussing here; I have generally rendered it as “ordination” or “holy orders.” However, its range and nuances of meaning are much more complicated than that. For a good general discussion see P. Michaud-Quantin, “*Ordo et ordines*,” in P. Michaud-Quantin with M. Lemoine, *Études sur le vocabulaire philosophique du moyen âge* (Rome, 1970), pp. 85–101. See further F. Cardman, “The Medieval Question of Women and Orders,” *The Thomist*, 42 (1978), 582–99.

54. A similar argument, concerning the *gradus excellentiae* which ordination requires and which women cannot have, is put forward by Peter of la Palud, *In quat. Sent.*, fol. 134v.

55. This point is reiterated by John of Bassoles, *In quat. Sent. libros aurea*, ii, fol. 106v.

56. *Scoti opera*, xi.2.783.

57. *Scoti opera*, xi.2.785. Followed by John of Bassoles, *In quat. Sent. libros aurea*, ii, fol. 106v.

58. *Super quat. lib. Sent.*, p. 389.

59. *Bonaventurae opera*, iv.649.

60. *Epistola xxii.28* (Ad Eustochium); *PL* 22, cols. 413–15; tr. W. H. Fremantle et al., *The Principal Works of St. Jerome*, Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers, 2nd series, 6 (1892; repr. Grand Rapids, Mich., 1979), p. 34.

61. *Epistola xxii.27*; *PL* 22, cols. 412–13, tr. Fremantle, p. 34.

62. *In IV Sent.*, dist. XXIV, qu. 3, art. 1; *Aquinatis opera*, vii.2.899–90.

63. *Super quat. lib. Sent.*, p. 389.

64. Thomas of Strasbourg is more concerned with another verse of I Corinthians 11 (v.5), where Paul says that women should pray with their heads covered (*Comment. in sent.*, fol. 142v). Ordination, he declares, involves teaching in a church and certainly not the covering of one's head therein. This is, of course, not to be reduced to the risible notion that one cannot teach with one's head covered: no doubt Thomas had in mind the traditional sacred symbolism with which we are here concerned.

65. *Bonaventurae opera*, iv.649.

66. Leclercq, “Le Magistère,” p. 120.

67. The challenge presented by these two saints will be discussed below, where Eustace's treatment will be placed in a wider perspective.

68. *Aquinatis opera*, vii.2.907.

69. Martin, "Ordination of Women," pp. 52–53, 119 n. 65.

70. *Decretum*, 1a pars, dist. 23, C. 25; *Corpus iuris canonici*, ed. Friedberg, i.86. This document is part of a Pseudo-Isidorian collection of decretals, which Gratian considered genuine. Cf. Raming, *Exclusion of Women*, pp. 6–8, 42 n. 21.

71. *Bonaventurae opera*, iv.650.

72. *Scoti opera*, xi.2.783.

73. *Super quat. lib. Sent.*, p. 388.

74. John of Bassoles cites *Sacratas* to support St. Paul's prohibition of public teaching by women in church. Aquinas, Durandus, and Thomas of Strasbourg ignore the canon.

75. *Summa praedicandi*, ed. Morenzoni, p. 58.

76. Art. XII, qu. 1, in *Summa quaest. ord.* (Paris ed., i, fols. 83v–4v; Ferrara ed., 208–10). This account develops my previous discussion in "Transmission and Reception," pp. 314–16. See further the analysis of Henry's *quaestio* included in Alcuin Blamires's article, "The Limits of Bible Study for Medieval Women," in Lesley Smith and Jane H. M. Taylor (eds.), *Women, the Book and the Godly* (Cambridge, 1995), pp. 1–12.

77. Here the printed editions of Henry's *Summa* refer to Book ix of *De civitate Dei*, which apparently is incorrect. Relevant discussion occurs in xx. 1; cf. xxi. 5.

78. In a passage to be discussed later.

79. Following his discussion of whether a woman can be an *auditor sue auditrix* of theology, Henry poses similar questions of the young man, the immoral man, the man who clings to natural reason, and the man who is uninstructed in the secular sciences, before going on to ask if every man should be a student of this science and whether every man should be admitted to instruction in this science. For his material relating to the immoral man and the young man see Minnis, "Transmission and Reception," pp. 304–10, and pp. 43–47 above.

80. *Summa Gerardi*, qu. 7, art. 1; ed. De Vooght, pp. 383, 386.

81. *Liber de eruditione praedicatorum*, i, ed. Berthier, *De vita regulari*, ii, 406; tr. Tugwell, *Early Dominicans*, p. 223.

82. *Glossa ordinaria marginalis*, on I Timothy 2:11: "si loquitur mulier magis ad luxuriam irritatur et irritat." *Biblia glossata*, vi, col. 690.

83. Cf. rather Chrysostom, PG 62, 545.

84. Art. XI, qu. 2, *Summa quaest. ord.* (Paris ed., i, fols. 77v–8r; Ferrara ed., 191–92); also included in Blamires and Marx, "Woman Not to Preach," pp. 51–52.

85. On *colloquium mulierum* as a major cause of lechery see for instance Peraldus, *Summa vitiourum*, tract. III, pars iii, cap. 5 (*Summa*, ii.16r).

86. See pp. 226–29 below. Previously, Henry's arguments had been reworked by Gerard of Bologna, who lists five reasons why women cannot have the *officium docendi*: their speech is sexually provocative, their sex is weak and inconstant, they are inferior to men, for them to speak in church would be shameful, and they lack prudence (as was noted by Aristotle). *Summa Gerardi*, ed. De Vooght, pp. 371–72.

87. *Scoti opera*, xi.2.784.

88. See further Peter of la Palud's statement concerning the *infirmetas corporis* and *imperfectio rationis* of women; *In quart. Sent.*, fol. 134v.

89. *Super quat. lib. Sent.*, p. 389.

90. *In Sent. comm.*, fol. 364v.

91. Indeed, Gerard of Bologna managed to compress the possible impediments of youth, sex, and sin into a single *quaestio*, "quis uel qualis possit esse doctor huius sciencie"; *Summa Gerardi*, qu. 6, art. 2, ed. De Vooght, pp. 369–75.

92. Cf. the statement quoted on p. 176 above.

93. To echo Romans 7:24, "Who shall deliver me from this body of death?" (Revised Standard Version).

94. *Decretum*, 2a pars, causa 27, qu. 1, C. 23; *Corpus iuris canonici*, ed. Friedberg, i.1055. Raming argues that a form of clerical ordination was indeed involved here, "the consecration of the deaconess in Byzantine Asia Minor" being "conducted in a form parallel to that of the deacon"; *Exclusion of Women*, pp. 20–21, 54 n. 147. She speculates that Gratian may have believed the early Christian female diaconate was not "a true diaconate order in the strictest sense of the word" (p. 24), perhaps influenced by an exposition of I Timothy 3:11 attributed to Ambrose but actually by "Ambrosiaster" (p. 24), this being a proof-text explicitly used by

Gratian's successors.

95. *Decretum*, 1a pars, dist. 32,C. 18; *Corpus iuris canonici*, ed. Friedberg, i.122.

96. *Dialogi* iv.11; *PL* 77, cols. 336–37.

97. *Decretum*, 1a pars, dist. 32,C. 18; *Corpus iuris canonici*, ed. Friedberg, i.122. For discussion see Raming, *Exclusion of Women*, pp. 18–19.

98. Duns's interpretation of *Presbyter* is followed by Francis of Meyronnes, who cites him by name. *Script. luc. in quart. Sent.*, fol. 41v.

99. Qu. 42: *Quare mulieres ad sacros ordines non promoveantur?* in *Alberti opera*, xxxvii.80–81.

100. Cf. qu. 41, 7: If women are unable to take Sacred Orders due to the curse imposed on all women at the Fall, the Virgin ought to be exempt from this prohibition, “since she was apart from other women, for she was blessed among women.” On the same principle, if women should not be ordained because a woman was the beginning of sin, Mary ought to be ordained because she was the beginning of life for all. The Virgin was “not among the number of all [women] but above all.” “Not for you but for everyone else has the law been established,” declares Albert, citing Esther 15:12–13 (*Alberti opera*, xxxvii.79–80).

101. Qu. 41, 1, 3, and 4, in *Alberti opera*, xxxvii.79–80.

102. Here and in the following discussion I draw on the final part of Albert's general answer to *quaestiones* 36–43; *Alberti opera*, xxxvii.84–87.

103. Considerable attention is paid to Deborah's situation in the *Glossa ordinaria* on Judges 4; *Biblia glossata*, ii, cols. 175–76. In her case sex-difference did not matter, and she was granted the gift of prophecy on account of her *puritas mentis*. This is a consolation to the female sex, for it proves that women should not suppose that they cannot receive the gift of prophecy on account of their female infirmity. Another gloss quotes Galatians 3:28 to the effect that in Christ “there is neither male nor female,” hence Moses was a *propheta* and Mary (presumably the Virgin Mary) was a *prophetissa*. The Holy Spirit, not finding worthy men, gave Deborah the gift of prophecy, this being a shame and an affront to the male sex.

104. On which see especially Katherine L. Jansen, *The Making of the Magdalen: Preaching and Popular Devotion in the Later Middle Ages* (Princeton, 2000), pp. 52–99. Jansen quotes the views of several theologians who emphasized that the Magdalene's preaching was only by special privilege, together with Vincent of Beauvais's ingenious resolution of the problem: when she heard St. Paul's prohibition of women preachers Mary instantly retired from her apostolic career and proceeded to lead a life of penance and contemplation. *Making of the Magdalen*, pp. 65–66; cf. *Speculum historiale*, IX.102.

105. *Legenda aurea*, 2nd ed. by G. P. Maggioni (Tavarnuzze, Florence, 1998), i, 631; tr. W. G. Ryan, *The Golden Legend* (Princeton, 1993), i, 376–77.

106. *Summa theologiae*, 2a 2ae, qu. 177, art. 2 (xlv.132–35). This *quaestio* is one of the major influences on the anti-Brut question on whether women ought to teach men in public, on which more later.

107. But the reference might actually be to his father, Henry suggests. (Here he may be indebted to the *Glossa ordinaria* which, as Spencer notes, makes this very point; *English Preaching*, p. 379, n. 125.) However, if Solomon's mother was indeed the teacher in question, then we are dealing with private teaching, *doctrina privata* (cf. Aquinas's solution, as quoted above). Henry wins either way.

108. Here *in silentio* designates “private,” “domestic” and “non-public” speech rather than the absence of speech, though of course the connection with St. Paul's statement (I Tim. 2:12) that a woman should not teach but “be in silence” (*esse in silentio*) is evident and no doubt intended. The Latin term *silentium* covers a range of meanings including “stillness, quiet, tranquility, obscurity.”

109. Reiterated in the anti-Brut *quaestio*, “Woman Not to Preach,” ed. Blamires and Marx, p. 61 (where Henry is cited explicitly). The *quaestio* (which is difficult to understand at this stage) seems to be saying that the issue of having sound doctrine is not relevant here—perhaps because it is dealing with the views of heretics who hold doctrines which are anything but sound?

110. The “chiefly” seems to admit the possibility that women may teach boys.

111. Alcuin Blamires, “Women and Preaching in Medieval Orthodoxy, Heresy, and Saint's Lives,” *Viator*, 26 (1995), 135–52 (p. 147).

112. By Blamires, “Women and Preaching,” pp. 147–48. True, Eustace may appear somewhat radical in comparison with the *Sentences* commentators' discussions of the

ordination of women and Henry of Ghent's discussion of that rare creature the *doctrix*, but she has much in common with those theologians who defended *contemporary* or near-contemporary holy women (cf. especially Adam Easton's treatise on Bridget of Sweden, discussed in the following section).

113. Leclercq, "Le Magistère," pp. 119–20.

114. See n. 103 above, and cf. Blamires's excellent discussion of Eustace's *quaestio*, "Women and Preaching," pp. 142, 147–49.

115. Cf. Romans 10:15, "How will they preach, unless they be sent?" traditionally read as an affirmation of the importance of the preacher being "sent out" with the proper authority; see p. 52 above.

116. It is not too difficult to venture an informed guess as to what might have happened. The exceptional nature of St. Bridget's case would have been emphasized, many and marvelous reasons given why she functioned above and beyond the "common state of women." Cf. our discussion of defenses of St. Bridget in the next section of this chapter.

117. Chobham, *Summa praedicandi*, p. 71.

118. Cf. Chobham, *Summa praedicandi*, pp. 57–59.

119. Perhaps because he had been a priest of Cybele? But Jerome may simply have been slandering him.

120. *Epist.* xli.4, *PL* 22, col. 476; tr. Fremantle et al., p. 56.

121. Thomas of Strasbourg goes so far as to present the Cataphrygians as actually adducing authorities from both canons, namely canon law and holy Scripture, in disguising their error—which would seem to indicate that his knowledge of the sect was sketchy, to say the least. The Cataphrygians are not mentioned in the discussions of Aquinas, Peter of Tarantasia, Richard of Middleton, Duns Scotus, Durandus, Peter of la Palud, Francis of Meyronnes, and John of Bassoles.

122. This material seems to have entered the *Sentences* commentaries via the *Decretum* and its commentaries, glosses on the canon *Diaconissam* being the crucial source. In reinforcing the view that women cannot be ordained to the diaconate, Hugutio of Pisa and Joannes Teutonicus cite the authority of St. Ambrose, who is supposed to have attacked the Cataphrygians for having twisted St. Paul's words (at I Timothy 3:11) to mean that women could indeed receive this *ordo*. In fact, they were following not Ambrose but the virulently antifeminist "Ambrosiaster," who in his commentary on the above-mentioned passage from I Timothy says that the Cataphrygians falsely believed that Paul was talking about female as well as male deacons. See Martin, "Ordination of Women," pp. 45–47; Raming, *Exclusion of Women*, pp. 18, 81–83.

123. For a recent account of Waldensian Bible translation and relevant bibliography see A. Patschovsky, "The Literacy of Waldensianism," in Peter Biller and Anne Hudson (eds.), *Heresy and Literacy, 1000–1530* (Cambridge, 1994), pp. 112–36 (pp. 113–17).

124. For discussion and bibliography, see Biller, "Cathars and Material Women."

125. *The Book of St. Gilbert*, ed. R. Foreville and G. Keir (Oxford, 1987), p. 47.

126. Given this inclusion, after 1234 Innocent's statement could have become widely known; at any rate, it was potentially available to all the *Sentences* commentators here discussed. Cf. Biller, "Cathars and Material Women," p. 68; see further E. Ann Matter, "Innocent III and the Keys to the Kingdom of Heaven," in L. Swidler and A. Swidler (eds.), *Women Priests: A Catholic Commentary on the Vatican Declaration* (New York, 1977), pp. 145–51.

127. *Decretales Gregorii IX*, Lib. V, tit. 37, cap. 10; *Corpus iuris canonici*, ed. Friedberg, ii. 886–87; cf. La Palud, *In quart. Sent.*, fol. 134v.

128. Dunbabin, *Hound of God*, p. 51.

129. Fishacre says that "Christ did not give the keys to the blessed Mary, but to Peter, although she was more excellent than the Apostles"; ed. Martin, "Ordination of Women," pp. 54, 119–20. Innocent had said that "although the most blessed virgin Mary was more worthy and more excellent than all the Apostles, yet not to her but to them did the Lord commit the keys of the kingdom of heaven."

130. This gloss on *Diaconissam* is explicitly cited as a proof-text by Duns Scotus and Thomas of Strasbourg, as noted above.

131. Cf. notes 94 and 122 above. The Ambrosiaster material is summarized in the *Glossa ordinaria* on I Timothy 3:11.

132. *Doctrinale*, iii.373.

133. *De veritate*, qu. 12, art. 5, in *Quaestiones disputatae et quaestiones duodecim quodlibetales*, 5th ed. (Turin and Rome, 1927), iii.290–92; tr. J. V. McGlynn, *St. Thomas Aquinas: The Disputed Questions on Truth* (Chicago, 1953), ii.128–32.

134. *De probatione spirituum*, 7, in *Œuvres complètes*, ed. P. Glorieux (Paris, 1960–73), ix.180; tr. Paschal Boland, *The Concept of “Discretio Spirituum” in Jean Gerson’s “De probatione spirituum” and “De distinctione verarum visionum a falsis”* (Washington, D.C., 1959), p. 38.

135. *De probatione spirituum*, 5, ed. Glorieux, ix.179.

136. *De probatione spirituum*, 7, ed. Glorieux, ix.180; tr. Boland, p. 31.

137. *De probatione spirituum*, 9, ed. Glorieux, ix.181; tr. Boland, pp. 32–33.

138. A little later Gerson asks, “When something can be accomplished by human endeavour, whether this pertains to practical matters or to speculative ones, why is it necessary to seek or to wait for a divine communication from heaven? This seems more like tempting God than honouring him.” *De probatione spirituum*, 10, ed. Glorieux, ix.183; tr. Boland, p. 35.

139. *De distinctione verarum visionum a falsis*, ed. Glorieux, iii.40; tr. Boland, pp. 83–84.

140. This treatise has been edited by James A. Schmidtke, “Adam Easton’s Defense of St. Birgitta” (Ph.D. diss., Duke University, 1971), to which reference is made below. I have also drawn on Schmidtke’s translation, but made many changes. The initial eleven articles of the *Defensorium S. Birgittae* are concerned with the rule for the monastic order of St. Saviour, the *Regula Sancti Salvatoris*, which Bridget claimed to have received in a vision from Christ Himself, while articles 12 through 36 address the *Sermo angelicus*, the lessons for Matins (concerning the excellence of the Virgin Mary) for her new order which an angel supposedly had revealed to Bridget. The treatise ends with a defense of four prayers also revealed to her. An excellent discussion of parts of the *Defensorium* has been provided by Claire L. Sahlin, *Birgitta of Sweden and the Voice of Prophecy* (Woodbridge, 2001), pp. 183–92.

141. *Defensorium S. Birgittae*, ed. Schmidtke, p. 173.

142. *Defensorium S. Birgittae*, ed. Schmidtke, p. 175.

143. *Defensorium S. Birgittae*, ed. Schmidtke, p. 189.

144. *Defensorium S. Birgittae*, ed. Schmidtke, pp. 171–72.

145. *Defensorium S. Birgittae*, ed. Schmidtke, p. 174.

146. *Defensorium S. Birgittae*, ed. Schmidtke, pp. 173–74.

147. *Defensorium S. Birgittae*, ed. Schmidtke, p. 200.

148. In 1372 Bridget visited Cyprus to advise the royal family, and had her prophecies of the punishment in store for Famagusta (which she likened to Sodom and Gomorrah) read aloud to its people in the main square.

149. This claim is historically plausible. In the *Vita* composed by Prior Peter and Master Peter shortly after Bridget’s death, we read of how she was instructed by the Virgin Mary to tell Alfonso of Jaén “to write down and copy the books of the revelations that had been divinely given to her and which indeed until then had been kept secret.” On her deathbed, following another divine command she orders “her confessors to hand over to the said hermit [i.e., Alfonso] all the secret revelations and all others that they had not yet handed over” so that he “might have them written out and that he might publish them to the nations for the honor and glory of God.” *Birgitta of Sweden: Life and Selected Revelations*, tr. A. R. Kezel (New York, 1990), p. 95.

150. “‘Saving’ by Faint Praise: St. Birgitta of Sweden, Adam Easton and Medieval Antifeminism,” *American Benedictine Review*, 33 (1982), 149–61 (p. 161).

151. *Defensorium S. Birgittae*, ed. Schmidtke, pp. 185–89.

152. *Summa theologiae*, 3a, qu. 55, art. 1, 3, and ad 3um (lv.36–39). Easton will return to this Aquinas passage; see below.

153. Easton’s search for predecessors of St. Bridget may be compared with that undertaken by Alfonso of Jaén in his *Epistola solitarii ad reges* (1375–76), where we find invoked Miriam, Judith, Esther, Huldah, Deborah, Hannah, Hagar, Sampson’s mother, Anna, Elizabeth, Lucy, the Tiburtine Sibyl, and the Erythraean Sibyl. See *Alfonso of Jaén: His Life and Works with Critical Editions of the “Epistola Solitarii,” the “Informaciones” and the “Epistola Serui Christi,”* ed. Arne Jönsson, *Studia Graeca et Latina Lundensia* 1 (Lund, 1989), pp. 120–21. For a Middle English translation of this passage see the appendix to Rosalynn Voaden’s *God’s Words, Women’s Voices* (York, 1999), pp. 164–65.

154. See especially the discussion by Clare L. Sahlin, “The Prophetess as Preacher: Birgitta of Sweden and the Voice of Prophecy,” *Medieval Sermon Studies*, 40 (1997), 29–44

- (pp. 32–33). See further Sahlin, *Voice of Prophecy*, pp. 192–202.
155. Sahlin, “Prophetess as Preacher,” p. 32.
 156. Sahlin, “Prophetess as Preacher,” p. 32; Sahlin, *Voice of Prophecy*, pp. 133–35.
 157. On these texts see Sahlin, “Prophetess as Preacher,” pp. 32–33; Sahlin, *Voice of Prophecy*, pp. 212–20.
 158. *Revelaciones*, VI.8.6; *Revelaciones*, Book 6, ed. Birger Bergh (Stockholm, 1991), p. 67.
 159. See Sahlin, “Prophetess as Preacher,” p. 34. The second of these sermons states that the Holy Spirit infused the Apostles and other male and female disciples alike, “so that they could preach Christ and teach the faith,” and “so even in this way was it done in our times with the blessed Birgitta.” The Church sometimes accepts being enlightened by females, as when Deborah judged Israel (Judges 4). After all, in Christ “there is neither male nor female” (Galatians 3:28). The third sermon explains that, while normally the Church does not permit layfolk to engage in public preaching, Bridget—as a woman called directly by Christ—was an exception to the rule. See Sahlin, “Prophetess as Preacher,” pp. 34–35.
 160. *Die Visionen der hl. Elisabeth und die Schriften der Äbte Ekbert und Emecho von Schönaue*, ed. F. W. E. Roth (Brünn, 1884), p. 40; tr. Anne L. Clark, *Elisabeth of Schönaue: The Complete Works* (New York, 2000), p. 97.
 161. *Revelationes Gertrudianae ac Mechthildianae*, ed. by the Solesmes monks (Poitiers, 1875–77), ii.435–37; tr. Tobin, *Flowing Light of the Godhead*, pp. 31–33. The author is probably not to be identified with Heinrich of Halle.
 162. *Il Libro della Beata Angela da Foligno*, ed. L. Thier and A. Calufetti, *Spicilegium Bonaventurianum* 25 (Grottaferrata, 1985), p. 742; tr. Paul Lachance, *Angela of Foligno: Complete Works* (New York, 1993), pp. 317–18.
 163. *Dialogus contra Pelagianos*, ii.22; *PL* 23, col. 660, tr. John Hritz, *St. Jerome: Dogmatic and Polemical Works* (Washington, D.C., 1965), p. 332.
 164. In similar vein, the anonymous Franciscan author of the defense of Bridget found in Lincoln Cathedral MS 114 argues that it was necessary for God to have used a woman to transmit his words to an effeminate church; see Sahlin, *Voice of Prophecy*, pp. 204–5. Furthermore, Hildegard of Bingen (1098–1179) was convinced that hers was an “effeminate age” in which men have grown so womanish that God must call women to do men’s work. . . . Only the scandal of female prophets will shock the Church into recognizing the greater scandal of men who can and should proclaim the Word, but will not”: Barbara Newman, “Divine Power Made Perfect in Weakness: St. Hildegard on the Frail Sex,” in L. T. Shank and J. A. Nichols (eds.), *Medieval Religious Women, II: Peaceweavers*, Cistercian Studies Series 72 (Kalamazoo, 1987), pp. 103–22 (pp. 105–6).
 165. *A Book of Showings to the anchoress Julian of Norwich*, ed. E. Colledge and J. Walsh (Toronto, 1978), i.222 (Short text, ch. 6).
 166. That is to say, at the same time as she experienced her foundational vision, she was also given to understand that it should not be kept to herself.
 167. *Mariale super Missus est*, qu. 42; *Alberti opera*, xxxvii.80.
 168. *Mariale super Missus est*, qu. 120; *Alberti opera*, xxxvii.174. One of Albert’s arguments in favor of this proposition depends on the notion that Mary in herself, i.e., by her very Scriptural role and significance, is a “prophet” of the type designated in Ephesians 4:11, which the *Gloss* explains as a reference to “explicators of Scripture.” “Mary herself is the explicator”—or, better, the explication—“of the whole Old Testament,” and “therefore she is a prophet or prophetess to the highest degree.” Albert certainly does not envisage the Virgin as an actual exegete engaged in exposition of the sacred text.
 169. And perhaps also of Wycliffite “Donatism” or “near-Donatism”? Cf. the remarks of Margaret Aston, “Lollard Women Priests?” p. 67; discussed in our introductory chapter. However, in his affirmation of the view that only ordained priests can celebrate the sacraments, Thomas Netter states that the Donatists did not go so far as to entrust this duty to layfolk (*Doctrinale*, ii.73). As elsewhere in the *Doctrinale*, Netter is eager to characterize Wyclif and his followers as worse than the heretics of yesteryear.
 170. *Selections from English Wycliffite Writings*, ed. Hudson, p. 19.
 171. On the trial and its implications, see especially Hudson, *Premature Reformation*, pp. 47–48, 281–82, 284n, 291, 295, 298–99, 326–27, 368, etc., together with her article “*Laicus litteratus*: The Paradox of Lollardy,” in Biller and Hudson (ed.), *Heresy and Literacy*, pp. 222–36. See further the summary account by K. B. McFarlane, *John Wycliffe and the Beginnings of English Nonconformity* (London, 1952), pp. 135–38, and of course Margaret Aston’s

pioneering study "Lollard Women Priests?" as reprinted in her *Lollards and Reformers*, pp. 49–70.

172. “. . . anima viri et anima mulieris sunt eiusdem speciei specialissime; ergo, cum anima viri sit capax illius potestatis, sequitur pari ratione quod anima mulieris sit capax etiam illius potestatis. Item, corpora virorum et mulierum sunt eiusdem speciei specialissime, similiter et anime et etiam composita. Ergo, mulier cuiuscumque potestatis spiritualis est capax cuius vir est capax. . . . Item non plus requiritur ad hoc quod aliquis sit sacerdos nisi quod sit a Deo admissus. . . .” *Utrum mulieres sunt ministri ydonei ad conficiendum eukaristie sacramentum*; London, British Library, Harley 31, fol. 198r. The entire *quaestio* runs from fols. 196v to 205r. It is second in the Harley sequence; for the others see n. 218 below. My translation differs in several important respects from C. W. Marx’s, as included in Blamires (ed.), *Woman Defamed*, p. 257.

173. The views here quoted go much farther than what Wyclif himself had said, though they can be regarded as logical developments of his doctrine. Cf. Aston’s important remarks in “Lollard Women Priests?” pp. 68–69.

174. *Doctrinale*, iii.371.

175. Cf. the discussion in Hudson, *Premature Reformation*, pp. 328–29.

176. *De potestate pape*, ed. J. Loserth (London, 1907), p. 271. Martin’s discussion of this material is the most extensive to have been produced hitherto; cf. his “Ordination of Women,” pp. 93–96, 148–52.

177. The reference is to I Corinthians 11:3–7, where St. Paul set in opposition women praying with their heads covered and men praying with their heads uncovered, symbolizing the belief that man “is the image and glory of God” whereas “the woman is the glory of the man” and therefore cannot claim “headship.”

178. *De potestate pape*, ed. Loserth, p. 272.

179. *Polychronicon Ranulphi Higden monachi Cestrensis; together with the English translations of John Trevisa and of an unknown writer of the Fifteenth Century*, ed. C. Babington and J. R. Lumby, Rolls Series, 41 (London, 1865–86), vi.333. On the (utterly fictitious, in my view) *papissa*—who allegedly flourished in the ninth century but is first mentioned in the *Chronicon universalis Mettensis* (c. 1250) usually attributed to Jean de Mailly—see especially Ebba M. Van der Helder, *Pope Joan in Legend and Drama: A Case Study in German Medieval Drama* (Armidale, Australia, 1987); Valerie R. Hotchkiss, “The Female Pope and the Sin of Male Disguise,” in her *Clothes Make the Man: Female Cross Dressing in Medieval Europe* (New York, 1996), pp. 69–82; and Alain Boureau, *The Myth of Pope Joan*, tr. L. G. Cochrane (Chicago, 2001). The case for Joan’s historical existence has recently been made (eloquently but incredibly) by Peter Stanford, *The She-Pope: A Quest for the Truth Behind the Mystery of Pope Joan* (London, 1998).

180. For late-medieval thought on God’s absolute and ordained powers see Lawrence Moonan, *Divine Power: The Medieval Power Distinction up to Its Adoption by Albert, Bonaventure, and Aquinas* (Oxford, 1994); W. J. Courtenay, *Covenant and Causality in Medieval Thought* (London, 1984), and *Capacity and Volition: A History of the Distinction of Absolute and Ordained Power* (Bergamo, 1990); and Rega Wood, “Ockham’s Repudiation of Pelagianism,” in *The Cambridge Companion to Ockham*, ed. P. V. Spade (Cambridge, 1999), pp. 350–73 (esp. pp. 356, 357–61, 365–66).

181. All these examples are taken from William of Ockham’s quodlibetal questions; cf. the translation by A. J. Freddoso and F. E. Kelley, *William of Ockham: Quodlibetal Questions* (New Haven, 1991), pp. 42, 120, 290, 304, 324, 376, 587–88, 500–502.

182. *Ockham: Quodlibetal Questions*, tr. Freddoso and Kelley, pp. 172–73, 286, 287.

183. *De potestate pape*, ed. Loserth, p. 272.

184. *De potestate pape*, ed. Loserth, p. 272.

185. Here I refer to the belief that only a person in a state of righteousness has true authority, and therefore the functions which an unworthy office-holder performs lack such authority, and may be spurned. Indeed, such a person should not be appointed to high office in the first place, and if someone actually in power acts in a way which is contrary to his high calling, then his authority is, at the very least, seriously compromised.

186. Those High Priests are deemed important for present-day Christians in another way, not as precedents which the current church hierarchy should follow but as figures—at least insofar as they acted lawfully—of Christ, the true head of the Christian Church.

187. *De potestate pape*, ed. Loserth, pp. 275–77.

188. *De potestate pape*, ed. Loserth, p. 278.

189. *De potestate pape*, ed. Loserth, pp. 278–85.

190. *De potestate pape*, ed. Loserth, pp. 288–89.

191. *De potestate pape*, ed. Loserth, p. 290.

192. *De potestate pape*, ed. Loserth, pp. 291–92.

193. *De potestate pape*, ed. Loserth, p. 293.

194. *De potestate pape*, ed. Loserth, p. 294.

195. *De potestate pape*, ed. Loserth, pp. 295–98.

196. *De potestate pape*, ed. Loserth, pp. 299, 305.

197. *De potestate pape*, ed. Loserth, p. 300.

198. *De potestate pape*, ed. Loserth, p. 307.

199. *De potestate pape*, ed. Loserth, p. 308.

200. *De potestate pape*, ed. Loserth, p. 272; cf. p. 214 above.

201. On Wyclif's problems with previous teaching on *potentia absoluta* see J. A. Robson, *Wyclif and the Oxford Schools* (Cambridge, 1966), pp. 183–89, and especially Ian Christopher Levy, "Grace and Freedom in the Soteriology of John Wyclif," *Traditio*, 60 (2005), 1–59. The relevant disagreements of Wyclif and William Woodford (who were exact contemporaries at Oxford and read the *Sentences* at the same time) are authoritatively discussed by J. O. Catto, "William Woodford, O.F.M. (c. 1330–c. 1397)" (D.Phil. thesis, Oxford, 1969), pp. 139–45.

202. *Doctrinale*, iii, col. 372; cf. *Dialogus*, I.xi, ed. G. Lechler (Oxford, 1869), p. 74. According to Lechler's edition, the statement in question reads: "idem est *Deus facit hoc*, and *Deus potest facere hoc*." Wyclif's expression of what Netter took as necessitarianism is further illuminated by his later remark, "omnia que evenient de necessitate evenient" (*De potestate pape*, p. 313). This bears comparison with the view of Chaucer's Troilus that "al that comth, comth by necessitee" (*Troilus and Criseyde*, IV, 958ff.). The fact that a view characteristic of Wyclif is put into the mouth of this philosophical pagan would probably have amused Ralph Strode, one of the addressees of Chaucer's poem (V, 1857), particularly since at Oxford he had debated with Wyclif on that very topic. Cf. *Responsiones ad argumenta Radulphi Strode*, 6, in *Johannis Wyclif opera minora*, ed. J. Loserth (London, 1913), p. 181.

203. Here, to be sure, Netter is somewhat simplifying Wyclif's view on predestination. Recognizing the importance of finding room for the freedom of the will, Wyclif propounded a theory of "the ampliation of time: though every human action follows from the will of God, still the unchanging will of God as to future contingent events may be determined by human volition at specific moments," this being made possible by the fact that God is eternally present. Cf. J. I. Catto, "Wyclif and Wycliffism at Oxford, 1356–1430," in J. O. Catto and Ralph Evans (eds.), *The History of the University of Oxford*, vol. 2: *Late Medieval Oxford* (Oxford, 1992), pp. 175–261 (p. 193); Kenny, *Wyclif*, pp. 31–41; and Robson, *Wyclif and the Oxford Schools*, pp. 196–217. The argument that "Wyclif's soteriology" actually makes "quite a lot of room for human free will even as he insists on the leading role of divine grace in all good works" has recently been made powerfully by Levy, "Grace and Freedom." See further the excellent discussion of the operation of the concepts of predestination and free will in vernacular Lollard sermons, in *English Wycliffite Sermons*, ed. Gradon and Hudson, iv.57–65.

204. *De potestate pape*, ed. Loserth, pp. 308–9. In the interim, Wyclif returns to the issue of baptism with which he had prefaced the passage quoted on p. 216 above, now asserting that "it seems to me lawful and expedient that a layman should carry out baptism." That is, of course, the orthodox view. However, Wyclif moves into heterodoxy when he declares that, "since it is not necessary for salvation that any predestinate man should corporally receive the other sacraments, then it seems to me that one ought not to presume to administer the other sacraments." (Baptism, then, retains its importance— but one does not have to be an ordained priest to administer it.) Wyclif defends the special status of baptism, through a none-too-clear argument to the effect that reservation or restriction of power can happen for good reasons as well as bad. A parallel is drawn with the fact that "a guilty man can approach the roman pontiff to obtain the benefit of absolution both in a foolish way, and in a pious way." In both cases, it is the sacrament—whether of absolution or of baptism—which is important, rather than the pride or avarice of the prelate (presumably of the pontiff from whom absolution is sought) or of the status (priestly or lay) of the person administering the baptism.

205. Cf. p. 210 above.

206. *De potestate pape*, ed. Loserth, p. 272; cf. p. 213 above.

207. *Doctrinale*, iii.372.

208. *De potestate pape*, ed. Loserth, pp. 312–13.

209. For citation of important passages (and other passages which complicate the issue) see Wilks, “Predestination, Property, and Power: Wyclif’s Theory of Dominion and Grace,” in Wilks, *Wyclif*, pp. 16–32 (pp. 19–22). Cf. Workman, *Wyclif*, ii.13; cf. pp. 9–10. Wyclif sought to reassure those who were worried by the possibility that a damned priest was ministering to them by stating that no one will suffer punishment because of another’s lack of grace. Cf. *De ecclesia*, ed. J. Loserth (London, 1886), p. 464.

210. *Heresy in the Later Middle Ages* (Manchester, 1967), ii.59.

211. “Predestination, Property, and Power,” p. 24.

212. Hudson, *Premature Reformation*, p. 360. Cf. the Wycliffite treatise *De officio pastoralis*, which comments that, “we may not 3it wite for certeyn which persone is of cristes spouse of alle þe men þat wandren heere, but we may gesse & þat is ynow.” Just as we may guess that one man who “holdiþ wel cristes lawe is a leme of hooly chirche,” so also we may guess that “an-oper man þat reuersiþ cristis lawe” is “a leme of þe fend & no part of hooly chirche.” *English Works of Wyclif*, ed. Matthew, p. 422.

213. *Premature Reformation*, p. 362.

214. To revert to the relevant *Polychronicon* passage, as quoted on p. 213 above.

215. I number the excursus in Trefnant’s register as follows: 1: pp. 285–89 (beginning “In nomine patris. . . .Ego Walterus Brut. . .”), 2: pp. 289–336, 3: pp. 336–50, 4: pp. 350–57, 5: pp. 357–58. It is far too risky to assume that they correspond exactly to the *cedulae* mentioned by the notary, particularly given their suspiciously unequal length. Did the notary edit the material provided by Brut, at least to the extent of bringing together certain items which (in his view) had some logical connection? Given that this is impossible to determine, we must accept the five excursus as the closest we can possibly get to Brut’s own thought as recorded in his own words, the originals having been lost. Lollard *cedulae*, or *rollis* as they were called in English, seem to have been ephemeral documents; for discussion see Anne Hudson, “Some Aspects of Lollard Book Production,” in Hudson, *Lollards and Their Books*, pp. 181–91 (pp. 183–84).

216. *Registrum Johannis Trefnant*, ed. Capes, pp. 368–94. Capes (following the manuscript’s apparent error) erroneously labels this section as a response to William Swinderby, whose trial is also recorded in Trefnant’s register. Cf. Aston, “Lollard Women Priests?” p. 54 n. 21, and especially Anne Hudson, “The Problems of Scribes: The Trial Records of William Swinderby and Walter Brut,” *Nottingham Medieval Studies*, 49 (2005), 80–104 (p. 92). Hudson’s discussion brings out well the “deeply perplexing” nature of the materials as recorded in the register; “not all of them” are “fully understood or placed in the correct position by the scribe,” and there are significant gaps (pp. 80, 103).

217. Cf. Anne Hudson, “*Laicus litteratus*: The Paradox of Lollardy,” in Biller and Hudson (eds.), *Heresy and Literacy*, pp. 222–36 (p. 223).

218. They are: *Utrum liceat mulieribus docere viros publice congregatos* (London, British Library, Harley 31, fols. 194v–196r); *Utrum mulieres sunt ministri ydonei ad conficiendum eukaristie sacramentum* (Harley 31, fols. 196v–205r); *Utrum quilibet laicus iustus sit sacerdos noue legis* (216r–218r); and *Utrum mulieres conficiunt vel conficere possunt* (fols. 218r–223r). The last two questions as here listed also appear in London, British Library, MS Royal 7 B III, fols. 1r–4v.

219. According to Trefnant’s register, this team included an impressively large number of university men: fifteen masters of theology, three baccalaureates in theology, and two canon lawyers. *Registrum Johannis Trefnant*, ed. Capes, pp. 359–60.

220. Cf. Alastair Minnis, “*Respondet Walterus Bryth*. . . Walter Brut in Debate on Women Priests,” in Barr and Hutchinson (eds.), *Text and Controversy*, pp. 229–49.

221. *Registrum Johannis Trefnant*, ed. Capes, pp. 336–50.

222. *Registrum Johannis Trefnant*, ed. Capes, p. 341; cf. the translation by John Foxe, *Acts and Monuments*, 4th ed. by Josiah Pratt (London, 1877), iii.176. Here Brut refers to Berengar of Tours, on whose association with the traditional question *quid mus sumit* see Gary Macy, “Of Mice and Manna: *Quid Mus Sumit* as a Pastoral Question,” *RTAM* 58 (1991), 157–66. On Berengar’s views, and reactions against them, see Rubin, *Corpus Christi*, pp. 16–22, 33, 35, 66, 171 n. 51.

223. Here I draw on Foxe’s lively translation; *Acts and Monuments*, iii.179.

224. *Registrum Johannis Trefnant*, ed. Capes, p. 345. Parts of the following discussion have

been translated by C. W. Marx in Blamires (ed.), *Woman Defamed*, pp. 257–60.

225. Peter Lombard himself had made it very clear that a woman can baptize in case of necessity, no priest being present. *Lib. sent.*, IV, dist. VI, cap. 1 (ii.268); cf. our discussion in the second section of Chapter 1, above.

226. *Registrum Johannis Trefnant*, ed. Capes, p. 345; tr. Marx in Blamires (ed.), *Woman Defamed*, p. 258.

227. For Wyclif's own support for this view see *De veritate sacrae scripturae*, ed. Buddensieg, ii.156. For statements that preaching is more important than consecrating the sacraments in general see *Sermones*, ed. Loserth, i.110 and 377, and *Opus evangelicum*, ed. Matthew, i.375.

228. For fuller discussion of this and other Lollard views of marriage, see our discussion in Chapter 4.

229. Here we are dealing with the classic refutation of Donatism (cf. pp. 13–14, 55, 62–63, etc.). And yet, Brut's opponents manage to attribute Donatism to Brut, and quote this same *auctoritas* in so doing. See pp. 232–33, 236.

230. *Registrum Johannis Trefnant*, ed. Capes, p. 346.

231. Tr. Marx in Blamires (ed.), *Woman Defamed*, p. 260.

232. *Registrum Johannis Trefnant*, ed. Capes, p. 347.

233. Cf. Aston's shrewd remark, "There was an integral connection between the denial of transubstantiation and the claim for a female priesthood"; "Lollard Women Priests?" p. 61.

234. *Registrum Johannis Trefnant*, ed. Capes, pp. 382–83.

235. I have used the edition by Blamires and Marx, "Woman Not to Preach," and drawn upon Marx's partial translation in Blamires (ed.), *Woman Defamed*, pp. 251–55, making occasional alterations.

236. Cf. pp. 186, 193–95 above.

237. Tr. Blamires and Marx, "Woman Not to Preach," p. 58 n. 108.

238. *Summa theologiae*, 2a 2ae, qu. 177 (xlv.132–35); discussed above.

239. This point is obscured in Marx's translation; Blamires (ed.), *Women Defamed*, p. 254.

240. This is my own understanding of the gist of a difficult and possibly corrupt passage in the Latin; Blamires and Marx, "Woman Not to Preach," pp. 62–63.

241. Here I depart from Marx's translation; Blamires (ed.), *Women Defamed*, p. 255.

242. Following Aquinas, *Summa theologiae*, 2a 2ae, qu. 177, art. 2 (xlv.132–35); discussed above.

243. Jerome, *Epist.* liii, 6 and 7; tr. Fremantle et al., p. 99.

244. *Doctrinale*, i.638. This refutation forms part of Book ii, art. 3, ch. lx[x]iii, "Contra quendam Doctorem Wiclevistam [i.e., John Purvey] quod non licet singulis Christianis passim praedicare quilibet, sine autoritate antistitis." Cf. Netter's earlier statement, at col. 619. On Purvey's *De compendiis scripturarum* see Aston, "Lollard Women Priests?" p. 65, and Anne Hudson, "John Purvey: A Reconsideration of the Evidence for His Life and Writings," in her *Lollards and Their Books*, pp. 85–110 (p. 94).

245. *Doctrinale*, i.639.

246. Cf. *Epist.* cxxvii, 7; tr. Fremantle et al., pp. 255–56.

247. The following discussion concentrates on this *quaestio*, since it is the most comprehensive and capacious of the set, and covers much of the ground treated in the other three. The substantial amount of overlap between the four questions could be taken as evidence of collaborative authorship, the idea being that members of Trefnant's panel of experts shared ideas and arguments, recording them without worrying about repetition.

248. Harley 31, fol. 196v.

249. For limb imagery as used in orthodox discussion of this matter see above, pp. 14, 62–63.

250. The question's *tertia conclusio* adds that women could not be priests under the Old Law: Moses consecrated Aaron and his sons, but not his daughters (Levit. 7:34–35; 8). Their prohibition is therefore all the stronger under the New Law (fol. 199v). Here Brut's opponent seems to have in mind the Lollard's claim that the division between priests and layfolk was a recent innovation, his point being that the exclusion of women from the priesthood goes back to the very origins of the church.

251. Harley 31, fol. 197r.

252. The *tertia conclusio* adds the argument that when it is said that the power of confection is given to the more perfect and excellent persons, this does not mean excellence

in terms of personal merit but rather in terms of natural things, status (*gradus*), or office. If this power were linked to merit, we would have the ridiculous situation in which a man who, having been good today was bad tomorrow, would lose tomorrow the power which he possessed today (fol. 199v).

253. In fact it originates not in any work of Augustine's but in Paschasius Radbertus's treatise on the Eucharist, as already noted on p. 373n above. However, cf. Augustine's similar statement that it makes no difference to the sacrament of baptism "how much worse he may be that confers it, just as it makes no difference how much better he may be." *De Baptismo contra Donatistas*, VI.ii.4; PL 43, col. 199 (already discussed in the introductory chapter to this book).

254. Cf. *Sent.* IV, dist. XIII, cap. 1, 1 (ii.311), and also the Lombard's similar statement about priestly agency in baptism: "Nec melior est baptismus qui per meliorem datur"; *Lib. sent.*, IV, dist. V, cap. 1 (ii.263–64). See further our relevant discussion in Chapter 1.

255. Cf. our discussion of this matter on pp. 55–63 above.

256. This application of Ecclesiastes 9:1 is also found in the third of the Harley *quaestiones*, entitled *Utrum quilibet laicus iustus sit sacerdos noue legis*, as is the subsequent argument, which relates to angelic goodness. If the dignity of the priestly office followed the dignity of virtue and merit, then, since a holy angel possesses the greatest dignity of virtue and merit, he would also possess the dignity of priestly office and thus every good angel could perform all the priestly functions (Harley 31, fol. 216r–v). This is refuted on the grounds that since an angel lacks flesh and bones and in particular does not have teeth and lips such a creature could not perform the sacramental rite. It would seem, then, that bodies are essential for sacramental performance—a point frequently made in the scholastic rejections of the ordination of women (cf. pp. 177–78 above). But, couldn't an angel assume a corporeal shape? And by means of that body utter the sacramental words? The answer is "no," because although an angel could indeed assume a human body, it would not have the requisite unity of body and soul; this action is proper to man, the requisite power flowing from the head (who is Christ) to the members—and angels are not members of this mystical body. Furthermore, Melchizedek and many other priests of the Old Law did not have the power of confecting the body of Christ, notwithstanding whatever degree of goodness they may have achieved (here I return to the second *quaestio*; fol. 197v). Therefore neither the holiness of a minister nor his personal goodness renders him a fit person to confect the Eucharist. What is required is holy orders, the imprint of the *character*.

257. Harley 31, fol. 197v. Cf. Aquinas, *Summa theologiae*, 3a, qu. 64, art. 5, discussed in our introductory chapter.

258. This follows verbatim Aquinas, *Summa theologiae*, 3a, qu. 64, art. 5, 1 (lvi.114–15). The catchphrase "qui non habet, quomodo dat?" (phrased by Aquinas as "nullus dat quod non habet") was widely believed to encapsulate Donatist doctrine. Saints Optatus and Augustine answered it with "Deum esse datorem." Cf. Willis, *Augustine and the Donatist Controversy*, p. 160.

259. Cf. Aquinas, *Summa theologiae*, 3a, qu. 64, art. 5, 2 (lvi.114–17).

260. Cf. Aquinas, *Summa theologiae*, 3a, qu. 64, art. 5, 3 (lvi.116–17). In the anti-Brut question's *tertia conclusio* it is explained that, according to the Bible commentators (*postillatores*), this passage from Leviticus is to be read as an affirmation of priestly dignity, as figuring spiritual mystery and representing deity. Priests should be pure in their behavior and perfect in body because they represent God; the female of the species is less perfect, and indeed, as Aristotle says, is a misbegotten male. And, if a woman is prohibited from entering the temple on account of her impurity (cf. Leviticus 12), how can she serve as a minister of the temple? If it be objected that women undergo rites of purification (as described in this same chapter of Leviticus), the response is that women are perpetually impure, chiefly because of their menses.

261. *Lib. sent.* IV, dist. xiii, cap. 1, 4 (ii.313); see also dist. xix, cap. 3, 1–2 (ii.369) and cap. 4, 4 (ii.371).

262. Cf. Aquinas, *Summa theologiae*, 3a, qu. 64, art. 5, ad 1um (lvi.116–17).

263. The treatment of this issue by Peter of Tarantasia, as summarized above (pp. 62–63), may be taken as representative of orthodox thought on the subject. Discussing whether or not baptism can be conferred by evil ministers, he notes that a dead member does not serve others as an effective channel. But in baptism the requisite influx of grace is not internal (relating to the person's own spiritual situation) but external, as coming from God.

Water may be conducted to the plains by a stone conduit; similarly, grace may be conveyed to the recipients of the sacrament by a bad minister.

264. Cf. Aquinas, *Summa theologiae*, 3a, qu. 64, art. 5, ad 2 (lvi.116–19).

265. Cf. Aquinas, *Summa theologiae*, 3a, qu. 64, art. 5, ad 3 (lvi.118–19).

266. Cf. Henry of Ghent's version of this and related arguments, discussed previously in the present chapter.

267. Cf. pp. 60–61 above. As there explained, *vestris* is plural and therefore must refer to the blessings of mere mortals rather than to the sacraments of the singular God. In *De Eucharistia* Wyclif breaks away from this consensus by arguing that, since the blessings of different priests vary according to their respective merits, the priest with less merit signifies the life of Christ less appropriately, and in that way his Eucharist is inferior to that confected by the good priest who possesses an abundance of merit. *De Eucharistia*, ed. Loserth, pp. 112–14; cf. our discussion in Chapter 2.

268. I use this somewhat convoluted phrasing because the theologian responsible for the second Harley *quaestio* does not attribute directly the doctrine in question to Brut, in contrast to his practice when he names the Lollard and stays close to his own words (as found in the notarized trial documents).

269. This argument exploits the utterly orthodox notion that in exceptional circumstances, in time of utter necessity (*ex parte necessitatis*) and when no priest is present, a woman may baptize, because the sacrament of baptism is “necessary absolutely and unconditionally,” to draw on Aquinas's discussion: *Summa theologiae*, 3a, qu. 65, art. 3, ad 4 (lvi.154–55). It would seem to follow, then, that in similar cases of “absolute necessity” a woman may confect the Eucharist.

270. Pace Marx, who in his pioneering translation of this passage renders the phrase, “anyone may bestow the priestly power on a woman by their own absolute authority”; Blamires (ed.), *Woman Defamed*, p. 257.

271. Harley 31, fol. 198v.

272. Harley 31, fol. 199r. In other words, God might choose to grant a woman priestly powers; that the theologian is willing to accept. But he is not willing to accept that the words used in the confection of the Eucharist give priestly power to whoever is saying them, such as a woman or a layman. These words have power only when said by a properly ordained priest.

273. But in Wyclif's case the matter is complicated by his predestinarianism which, as Netter claims (rightly, I believe), eliminates the notion of “could” or “might”—what God could do He actually does. Cf. above, p. 217.

274. Harley 31, fols. 202r–v. It also appears in the related *quaestio* (the fourth in the Harley sequence), on whether women confect or can confect as true priests the sacrament of the Eucharist; fol. 220v. A discussion of this version of the argument is included in my article “Making Bodies: Confection and Conception in Walter Brut's Vernacular Theology,” *The Medieval Translator*, 8 (2003), 1–16.

275. Or, could they be seen as scare tactics, designed to frighten away ordinary decent folk from heresy? It seems unlikely, however, that such coterie extremism was ever intended to reach the ears of the unlearned. Does not Brut's opponent remark that anyone who preaches—i.e., broadcasts to the populace at large—such bizarre propositions deserves to have his tongue cut out? That would seem to apply to himself as well. My assumption is that Trefnant's theologians were writing for fellow-professionals.

276. This has been demonstrated ably by Aers, *Sanctifying Signs*, pp. 67–82; cf. his article, “Walter Brut's Theology of the Sacrament of the Altar,” in F. Somerset, J. C. Havens, and D. G. Pitard (eds.), *Lollards and Their Influence in Late-Medieval England* (Woodbridge, 2003), pp. 115–26. As Fiona Somerset remarks, “if Brut did not attend university, he studied with someone who did”; “*Eciam mulier*: Women in Lollardy and the Problem of Sources,” in Linda Olson and Kathryn Kerby-Fulton (eds.), *Voices in Dialogue: Reading Women in the Middle Ages* (Notre Dame, Ind., 2005), pp. 245–60 (p. 248). Brut's thought frequently attains a high level of sophistication, and he comes across as an effective polemicist; one can easily imagine him as a superb preacher.

277. However, Gradon and Hudson have detected a possible allusion to the distinction in a vernacular Lollard sermon; cf. their edition of *English Wycliffite Sermons*, iv.57–58.

278. Blamires (ed.), *Woman Defamed*, p. 257; Harley 31, fol. 198v.

279. Pythagoras was credited with doctrines relating to the immortality, preexistence,

and transmigration of souls; see for example Augustine, *De trinitate*, xv.24, and *Contra academicos*, III.xvii, 37; cf. Isidore of Seville, *Etymologiae*, viii.5: *de haeresibus Christianorum*, 69. Tertullian was particularly vocal on the subject of metempsychosis; see his *Apologeticus adversus gentes pro christianis*, 48 (PL 1, cols. 521A–7B), *Ad nationes*, 1.19 (PL 1, col. 585B), and *De anima*, 28 (PL 2, cols. 697A–8C). It came to be associated with the Cathar heretics; cf. the brief statement in Alan of Lille's *De fide catholica*, 1.xi: "asseruit animam hominis merito peccati post mortem intrare in corpus alterius hominis vel bruti animalis" (PL 210, col. 317B–C). See further Bernard Gui, *Manuel de l'Inquisiteur*, ed. Mollat, p. 18, and especially the fuller discussion in Moneta of Cremona's treatise against Cathars, although its circulation in England is problematic: *Adversus Catharos et Valdenses libri quinque*, I.iv.5; ed. T. Ricchini (Rome, 1743, rpt. Ridgewood, N.J., 1964), pp. 61–62. A general discussion has been provided by Roland Poupin, *Les Cathares, L'Âme et la Réincarnation* (Portet-sur-Garonne, 2000).

280. Cf. Albert, *De animalibus*, lib. 18, tract. 2, cap. 3; ed. H. Stadler, *Beiträge zur Geschichte der Philosophie des Mittelalters*, xv–xvi (Munster, 1916–21), p. 1226.

281. See for example Augustine, *De civitate Dei*, xxii.17; followed by Peter Lombard in *Lib. sent.* IV, dist. XLIV, i.2 (ii, 516–17), and reiterated by generation after generation of his commentators. See further Thomas Aquinas, *Summa contra gentiles*, iv.82–95. The subsequent development of this idea was influenced by the thirteenth-century acceptance of the Aristotelian doctrine that the soul was the form of the body; hence the human body had to rise in order to provide matter to form.

282. Caroline Walker Bynum, "Material Continuity, Personal Survival and the Resurrection of the Body: A Scholastic Discussion in Its Medieval and Modern Contexts," in her *Fragmentation and Redemption: Essays on Gender and the Human Body in Medieval Religion* (New York, 1992), pp. 239–97 (p. 257).

283. *The Resurrection of the Body in Western Christianity, 200–1336* (New York, 1995), p. 255.

284. Hudson, "Laicus litteratus," p. 223, and "The Problems of Scribes"; Aston, "Lollard Women Priests?" p. 54.

285. There are four such citations in *Utrum mulieres sunt ministri ydonei ad conficiendum eucharistie sacramentum*, on fols. 201v and 202v, together with two brief mentions on fol. 204v. The other three *quaestiones* do not cite Brut by name.

286. Even Arundel's *Constitutions* recognized the academic needs of scholastic disputation, in the very act of warning against philosophical formulation of Christian truths in curious terms and words and banning debate which might undermine the authority of canon law. Cf. Foxe, *Acts and Monuments*, iii.246.

287. *Norwich Heresy Trials*, ed. Tanner, p. 142.

288. They were: Margery Baxter (*Heresy Trials*, ed. Tanner, p. 49), John Skyllly (pp. 52, 57), John Godesell (p. 61), Sibilla Godesell (p. 67), Richard Fleccher (p. 86), John Skyllan (p. 147), William Hardy (p. 153), Edmund Archer (p. 166), Thomas Mone (pp. 177, 179), and William Masse (p. 205). It seems reasonable to assume that they were following the teachings of the charismatic preacher William White. For White's heretical views, including the belief that *quilibet fidelis in Christo Jesu est sacerdos electae ecclesiae Dei*, see *Fasciculi zizaniorum*, pp. 422–24. See further our discussion in the following chapter of White's heterodox views on marriage.

289. Cf. *Fasciculi zizaniorum*, pp. 422–24. White's heterodox views on marriage will be discussed in the following chapter.

290. Aston, "Lollard Women Priests?" p. 66.

291. *Liber contra XII errores et hereses Lollardorum*, ed. Cronin, pp. 63–64.

292. *Doctrinale*, i, col. 638; cf. Aston, "Lollard Women Priests?" p. 65.

293. Aston, "Lollard Women Priests?" p. 66.

294. Cf. McSheffrey, *Gender and Heresy: Women and Men in Lollard Communities, 1420–1530* (Philadelphia, 1995), p. 4. While certainly not disputing this contention, Margaret Aston suspects that the female role in Lollardy may have been more significant than the records can readily reveal; "contemporary assumptions about gender roles made it easy for women to shelter behind men." Her main conclusion, however, is that "there is overall far more evidence indicating conformity than nonconformity"; with women probably doing much to maintain their families' integration "in the web of parish life." "Lollard Women," in Diana Wood (ed.), *Women and Religion in Medieval England* (Oxford, 2003), pp. 166–85 (pp.

172, 181). The research of Simon Forde has indicated that Wyclif himself “had a very ill-defined conception of the role women might play in the Church.” He “scarcely ever considered women” and “appears almost oblivious to medieval or contemporary women”; furthermore, “references that may be construed as being favourable towards women are extremely rare.” “‘The Strong Woman’ and ‘The Woman Who Surrounds a Man’: Perceptions of Woman in Wyclif’s Theological Writings,” *Revue d’histoire ecclésiastique*, 88, no. 1 (1993), 54–87 (p. 59); cf. Forde’s earlier essay, “Social Outlook and Preaching in a Wycliffite *Sermones dominicales* Collection,” in I. N. Wood and G. A. Loud (eds.), *Church and Chronicle in the Middle Ages: Essays Presented to John Taylor* (London, 1991), pp. 179–91. In similar vein, Dyan Elliott finds that, in Wycliffite writings, married women are “permitted a vague influence, but no real power.” There may be a general absence of “the kind of antifeminism which stalks” them in orthodoxy, but in Elliott’s view this is merely due to a desire to depict them as the passive victims of those wicked clerics who are the butt of the invective. “Lollardy and the Integrity of Marriage and the Family,” in Sherry Roush and Cristelle L. Baskins (eds.), *The Medieval Marriage Scene: Prudence, Passion, Policy* (Tempe, Ariz., 2005), pp. 37–54 (esp. pp. 50–53). The status and dignity afforded to women within earlier heretical sects, particularly Catharism, has also been exaggerated: cf. Peter Biller’s study, “Cathars and Material Women,” and also R. Abels and E. Harrison, “The Participation of Women in Languedocian Catharism,” *MS* 41 (1979), 215–51.

295. Cf. Fiona Somerset’s hypothesis that “Lollardy was never a hospitable ground for the growth of extraordinary learning among women,” formulated in the course of arguing that Walter Brut was not interested in “mounting any effective defence of women’s capacities.” “*Eciam Mulier*,” pp. 248, 256.

296. Aston, “Lollard Women Priests?” p. 69.

297. Cf. *Book of Margery Kempe*, i, 52; ed. Windeatt, p. 248.

298. The sociopolitical constructedness of Lollardy has received much attention lately. See for example Paul Strohm, “Heretic Burning: The Lollard as Menace and Victim,” being chapter 2 of his *England’s Empty Throne*, pp. 32–62, and two excellent essays in Somerset, Havens, and Pitard (eds.), *Lollards and Their Influence*, namely Andrew Cole’s “William Langland and the Invention of Lollardy” (pp. 37–58) and Andrew E. Larsen’s “Are All Lollards Lollards?” (pp. 59–72).

299. Cf. *Book of Margery Kempe*, i, 52; ed. Windeatt, p. 253.

300. Cf. p. 207 above.

CHAPTER 4. GENDER AS FALLIBILITY

1. Alcuin Blamires, “The Wife of Bath and Lollardy,” *MÆ* 58 (1989), 224–42 (p. 235). This brilliantly pioneering article—a major source of inspiration for the following inquiry—focused the issue of the Wife of Bath’s possible association with Lollardy as never before.

2. See for example the *Book of Margery Kempe*, i, 13, where Margery is threatened with being burned for heresy (ed. Windeatt, pp. 95–96).

3. *Repressor*, ed. Babington, i, 123. On the (dubious) reputation of Lollard women as “great reasoners in Scripture” see Claire Cross, “‘Great Reasoners in Scripture’: The Activities of Women Lollards, 1380–1530,” in Derek Baker (ed.), *Medieval Women: Dedicated and presented to Professor Rosalind M. T. Hill on the Occasion of Her Seventieth Birthday*, Studies in Church History, Subsidia, 1 (Oxford, 1978), pp. 359–80. An unusual form of satire against such creatures takes the form of the Czech poem known as *Viklefice* (*The Wycliffite Woman*), wherein the titular heroine invites a young lord to her house to “reveal the Holy Scriptures” to him; in fact, she bares her breasts, and sexual intercourse replaces Scriptural interpretation. Cf. Alfred Thomas, “The Wycliffite Woman,” in Olson and Kerby-Fulton (eds.), *Voices in Dialogue*, pp. 279–301. Responding to this article (on pp. 302–5), Dyan Elliott notes that there is nothing quite like this in English anti-Lollard polemic, “which rarely ran to impugning the proto-puritanical Lollard sect of sexual immorality.” My discussion later in this chapter will fully endorse that suggestion of “proto-puritanism,” while dealing with some of the (very few) occasions on which Lollards exposed themselves to this charge.

4. On the vexed matter of “Lollard education” see especially Hudson, *Premature Reformation*, pp. 180–200, and Copeland, *Pedagogy, Intellectuals and Dissent*, particularly pp.

5. There is no suggestion in the text that Alisoun actually disputed with Jankyn in their own house; there her reaction was rather to attack the material source of antifeminist argument, tearing pages from it. Within the economy of Chaucer's fiction, her disputation "a 3ens clerkis"—which rends Jankyn's book in a different way—takes place on the road to Canterbury.

6. John Oppel, "Saint Jerome and the History of Sex," *Viator*, 24 (1993), 1–22 (p. 5).

7. My coinage, but there is ample medieval warrant. See Minnis, *Magister amoris*, especially Chapter 5.

8. *History of English Poetry* (London, 1840), ii. 201.

9. "And for my land thus hastow mordred me?" Land Tenure, the Cloth Industry, and the Wife of Bath," *ChR* 14 (1980), 403–20 (p. 410).

10. Susan Crane, "The Writing Lesson of 1381," in Barbara Hanawalt (ed.), *Chaucer's England: Literature in Historical Context* (Minneapolis, 1992), pp. 201–21 (pp. 214–15). For these reasons, Crane believes that "we cannot understand her as a private subjectivity, nor does she so understand herself" (p. 214).

11. However, such statements must be carefully considered in light of the "renumbered husbands" variants which are a feature of the transmission of the Wife's *Prologue*; the interpretive problems they raise are well brought out by the studies cited in n. 168 below.

12. On this text see pp.155–56, 250, 300 above; it will be discussed further in the pages which follow.

13. "Heroides" and "Amores," ed. and tr. G. P. Goold and G. Showerman (Cambridge, Mass., 1986), pp. 354–55. On what the female sexuality presented in *The Wife of Bath's Prologue* owes to Ovid's *Ars amatoria*—with special reference to Ovidian discourse of erotic violence—see Marilynn Desmond's challenging study, *Ovid's Art and The Wife of Bath: The Ethics of Erotic Violence* (Ithaca, 2006).

14. Here, as elsewhere in this book, I use "auctoritee" (cf. the Latin *auctoritas*) in the technical sense of "an extract from an authoritative text, a passage from the work of an *auctor*."

15. The complicated textual issues relating to the Wife's *Prologue* will be addressed below. Suffice it to note here that the idiom of this particular couplet is quite consonant with what Chaucer says in lines which indubitably are his.

16. The coinage is Ian Johnson's, designed to highlight the cultural problems and paradoxes inherent in the notion of "female authority" in general and an "authoress" in particular, with specific reference to the holiness of women both ancient and modern, both continental and English, as presented in Middle English. See his article "Auctricitas? Holy Women and their Middle English Texts," in Rosalynn Voaden (ed.), *Prophets Abroad: The Reception of Continental Holy Women in Late-Medieval England* (Woodbridge, 1996), pp. 177–97.

17. Lydgate, *Minor Poems*, ed. Henry Noble MacCracken, EETS ES 107 and OS 192 (London, 1911–34), ii. 675–82. On such post-Chaucerian developments, see Helen Cooper, "The Shape-Shiftings of the Wife of Bath, 1395–1670," in Ruth Morse and Barry Windeatt (eds.), *Chaucer Traditions: Studies in Honour of Derek Brewer* (Cambridge, 1990), pp. 168–84.

18. Phillip Sparrow, ed. John Scattergood, *The Complete English Poems* (New Haven, 1983), p. 83.

19. Thomas Hoccleve's "Complaint" and "Dialogue," ed. J. A. Burrow, EETS OS 313 (Oxford, 1999), p. 67.

20. *The Life of Beatrice of Nazareth*, ed. and tr. Roger De Ganck with J. B. Hasbrouck (Kalamazoo, 1991), pp. 4–7.

21. "Putas displicuisset ista ipsi, an potius placuisset, & fuisset pro auctrice magna dogmatis pestilentis?" *Doctrinale*, ii.71. For a discussion of this curious claim, see Aston, "Lollard Women Priests?" pp. 65–66.

22. *Adversus Jovinianum*, i.14 (PL 23, col. 244B). Later (i.15; PL 23, col. 245C) he compares the situation of a woman who has contracted many marriages to that of "a penitent whoremonger"; cf. n. 28 below. The Jerome passages on which Chaucer drew are conveniently presented, with facing modern English translations, in *Jankyn's Book of Wicked Wyves*, ed. Ralph Hanna III and Traugott Lawler (Athens, Ga., 1997), pp. 158–93.

23. *Adversus Jovinianum*, i.2 (PL 23, col. 223B).

24. *Adversus Jovinianum*, i.40 (PL 23, cols. 281C–82A) and i.14 (PL 23, col. 244B–C).

25. She goes on to say that “the fifth man” was “noon housbonde to the Samaritan.” The Vulgate can easily be read thus, but the *Glossa ordinaria*, Lyre’s *Postilla litteralis*, and Jerome’s *Adversus Jovinianum* (i.14) are all quite clear that the man she has now, who is “not her husband,” is her sixth partner. *PL* 23, col. 244B; *Biblia glossata*, vi.1079–80.

26. *Adversus Jovinianum*, i.14 (*PL* 23, col. 233B–C).

27. *Adversus Jovinianum*, i.15 (*PL* 23, col. 245A–B).

28. Jerome further claims that Paul “allowed second marriages to incontinent persons, and did not limit the number of marriages, in order that women, although they saw themselves permitted to take a second husband, in the same way as a third or a fourth was allowed, might blush to take a second, lest they should be compared to those who were three or four times married.” It would seem, then, that with the second marriage the moral rot sets in, and thereafter it is downhill all the way. So while Jerome cannot, legally speaking, “condemn second nor third, nor, pardon the expression, eighth marriages,” by the same token he will welcome “even a penitent whoremonger.” *Adversus Jovinianum*, i.15 (*PL* 23, col. 245B–C).

29. *Adversus Jovinianum*, i.9 (*PL* 23, cols. 232C–33C).

30. *Adversus Jovinianum*, i.13 (*PL* 23, cols. 242C–43B).

31. *Adversus Jovinianum*, i.9 (*PL* 23, col. 233B–C).

32. *Adversus Jovinianum*, i.3 (*PL* 23, col. 223B).

33. *Biblia glossata*, vi.1114.

34. Here I use this term in the technical sense whereby foundational, authoritative texts in their entirety are designated. Cf. Minnis, *Medieval Theory of Authorship*, pp. 153–59, 202, 270n.

35. For a translation and discussion, see Minnis, Scott, and Wallace, *Medieval Literary Theory*, pp. 67–68, 87–100.

36. *Summa theologiae*, 3a, qu. 55, art. 5 (lv. 53).

37. *Summa theologiae*, 3a, qu. 55, ad 1 (lv. 55).

38. *Dives and Pauper*, i.1, ed. P. Barnum, EETS OS 275 (Oxford, 1976), p. 79.

39. The “hool preier of Salomon” is then quoted, with the “exposicioun of Bede and Lire [i.e., Nicholas of Lyre]” being offered by way of explanation: the central point is that extremes of poverty and richness alike are dangerous, hence Solomon asks merely for the necessities of life (“nedeful pingis”).

40. *De fide catholica*, i.30, in *PL* 210, col. 333; cf. M.-D. Chenu, *Introduction à l’Étude de Saint Thomas d’Aquin*, 2nd ed. (Montreal, 1954), p. 122.

41. Letter 118 (*Quo magis*), in *Le Débat*, ed. Hicks, p. 30; tr. Baird and Kane, p. 43.

42. Letter *Etsi facundissimus*, in *Le Débat*, ed. Hicks, p. 38; tr. Baird and Kane, pp. 44–45.

43. *Boswell’s Life of Johnson*, ed. G. B. Hill (Oxford, 1887), i.463.

44. “Wife of Bath and Lollardy,” pp. 226–29.

45. *Repressor*, ed. Babington, pp. 117–24.

46. What Wyclif actually believed in this regard is a matter of scholarly controversy; for differing views, see De Vooght, *Les Sources de la doctrine chrétienne*, pp. 168–200 (esp. pp. 184–85); M. Hurley, “*Scriptura sola*: Wyclif and His Critics,” *Traditio*, 16 (1960), 275–352; Eric Doyle, “William Woodford on Scripture and Tradition,” *Studia Historico-Ecclesiastica: Festgabe für Prof. Luchsius G. Spätling, O.F.M.*, ed. Isaac Vázquez, Bibliotheca Pontificii Athenaei Antoniani, 19 (Rome, 1977), pp. 481–502; and Catto, “William Woodford,” esp. pp. 491–502.

47. Material from this treatise is preserved in *De civili dominio*, Book iii, chapters 1–3, and *De apostasia*, chapters 1–2. See Eric Doyle, “William Woodford, O.F.M., and John Wyclif’s *De religione*,” *Speculum*, 52 (1977), 329–36. The passage here quoted may be found in *De civili dominio*, ed. R. L. Poole and J. Loserth (London, 1885–1904), iii.13.

48. Cf. Catto, “William Woodford,” pp. 491–502. Woodford assumes that Wyclif means truths contained explicitly or implicitly in Scripture in an historical or literal sense, and not in an allegorical, tropological or anagogical sense, since by these one could not know what was Catholic truth and what was not, or what was a heresy and what was not (Catto, p. 491).

49. Woodford, *Quattuor determinationes*, 2, in Oxford, Bodleian Library, MS Bodley 703, fol. 77r. Catholic faith is shown to be true in ways other than that it is contained in Scripture, Woodford declares. After all, many converts were made by the apostles before the text of Scripture was composed and written down. Cf. Catto, “William Woodford,” p. 495.

On Woodford's views in these *determinationes*, see further Ghosh, *The Wycliffite Heresy*, pp. 67–85.

50. *Repressor*, ed. Babington, pp. 117–24.

51. Cf. the convincing refutation by Catto, “William Woodford,” esp. p. 501: Woodford “found it [i.e., a literalist *sola scriptura* doctrine] in *De religione* and he never forgot it.”

52. “Wife of Bath and Lollardy,” p. 229.

53. *MED* s.v. *expres(se)li* (adv.) and *expres* (adj.).

54. “Wife of Bath and Lollardy,” pp. 228, 229.

55. “Wife of Bath and Lollardy,” p. 229. Cf. Hudson, “A Lollard Sect Vocabulary?” in her *Lollards and Their Books*, pp. 165–80.

56. Hudson, “A Lollard Sect Vocabulary?” p. 170.

57. Cf. *The Works of a Lollard Preacher*, ed. Anne Hudson, EETS OS 317 (Oxford, 2001), pp. 161–62.

58. *Two Wycliffite Texts*, ed. Hudson, p. 65. Once again, I place the name “William Thorpe” in inverted commas, since (whatever historical truth may lie behind this narrative) we are dealing with a hero-heretic who has been constructed for polemical purposes.

59. *Two Wycliffite Texts*, ed. Hudson, p. 65.

60. “Wife of Bath and Lollardy,” p. 226; cf. p. 229.

61. Cambridge, St. John's College, MS 195, fols. 1v–2r, ed. by James M. Dean, *Medieval English Political Writings* (Kalamazoo, 1996), p. 56.

62. V. I. J. Scattergood, *Politics and Poetry in the Fifteenth Century* (London, 1971), pp. 247–48.

63. One may compare the way in which Margery Kempe is accused of having gained her knowledge of Scripture from the devil (in order that she might make mischief): for how else could an uneducated woman like Margery have acquired information of so privileged a kind? “Her wot we wel that sche hath a devyl wythinne hir, for sche speketh of the Gospel” (*Book of Margery Kempe*, i.52; ed. Windeatt, p. 252). On this idea, see especially Barbara Newman, “Possessed by the Spirit: Devout Women, Demoniacs, and the Apostolic Life in the Thirteenth Century,” *Speculum*, 73 (1998), 733–70, and also her “Devout Women and Demoniacs in the World of Thomas of Cantimpré,” in Juliette Dor, Lesley Johnson, and Jocelyn Wogan-Browne (eds.), *New Trends in Feminine Spirituality: The Holy Women of Liège and their Impact* (Turnhout, 1999), pp. 35–60. In at least some cases, such an accusation may be interpreted, *inter alia*, as a reflex of the clerical desire to keep such information within their élite profession. Ironically enough, in the *Summoner's Tale* it is an aristocratic layman who considers this very explanation of a (lower-class) layman's “knowledge.”

64. Blamires, “Wife of Bath and Lollardy,” p. 235.

65. It may be added that Alisoun has also attended performances of “pleyes of myracles” (558), which were offensive to Lollard sensibilities. Cf. the comments on the Middle English *Tretise of Miraclis Pleyinge* on pp. 248, 366n above.

66. *Traité*, ed. Foreville, p. 119. Cf. p. 93 above.

67. For discussion of these and later testimonies see J. F. Davis, “Lollards, Reformers and St. Thomas of Canterbury,” *University of Birmingham Historical Journal* 9 (1963), 1–15, and R. E. Scully, “The Unmaking of a Saint: Thomas Becket and the English Reformation,” *Catholic Historical Review*, 86, no. 4 (2000), 579–602. Becket's conflict with Henry II was “regarded as prefiguring the crisis of the Henrician Reformation,” as A. G. Dickens notes; *The English Reformation*, 2nd ed. (University Park, Pa., 1989), p. 162. Little wonder, then, that the Becket cult became such an object of opprobrium in the Tudor period.

68. Tr. R. N. Swanson, *Catholic England: Faith, Religion and Observance before the Reformation* (Manchester, 1993), p. 292. On this Lollard (whose views on marriage will be discussed below) see especially Margaret Aston, “William White's Lollard Followers,” rpt. in her *Lollards and Reformers*, pp. 71–99.

69. Lollard disapproval of swearing may be illustrated from William Swinderby's statement that “men schuld not swere be any creature be ye lawe of God,” and “no mon schuld swer in ydel, as wilnygh all the poeple useth.” Alas, such swearing is practiced by both old and young, and particularly by “men of holy churche”—but few bishops seem to care. *Registrum Johannis Trefnant*, ed. Capes, p. 249. Cf. the relevant discussion in my introductory chapter.

70. Here I allude to the title and foundational thesis of Pierre Payer's study, *The Bridling of Desire: Views of Sex in the Later Middle Ages* (London, 1993).

71. Blamires, "Wife of Bath and Lollardy."

72. This treatise takes the form of a debate between "Alithia" (Truth, representing "solid theology"), "Phronesis" (Wisdom, representing "subtle and mature theology"), and "Pseustis" (Falsehood, or "captious infidelity," whose function is to bring out the truth by arguing against it); cf. Wyclif's own prologue, *Dialogus*, ed. Lechler, p. 38. Perhaps Wyclif got the idea from that widely read school text, the *Ecloga* of Theodulus, which features a debate between "Alithia" and "Pseustis."

73. "Non delector multum labi in ista materia, specialiter cum sit humanitus et saepe infundabiliter instituta"; *Dialogus*, ed. Lechler, p. 322. Phronesis goes on to say that, in his view, the consent of the couple and the approval of God are quite sufficient for the making of a marriage, leaving aside any sensible signs (including words) whatever. This radical doctrine will be discussed below.

74. "Nec delector in multiplicatione causarum divorcii, cum multae sunt infundabiliter humanitus ordinatae. . ."; *Dialogus*, ed. Lechler, p. 322. Anders Winroth has suggested to me that underlying the two *Dialogus* passages here cited may be the distinction (first outlined by Gratian) between natural law (given by God), which is immutable, and "custom," i.e., any kind of "positive law" issued by popes and princes, which is changeable. On this reading, custom or "positive law" relating to the making of marriage is an unstable human matter in that it has been ordained by popes and princes, and lacks the solid foundation of natural law; thus it becomes the object of Phronesis's scorn. For discussion of "divorce" in relation to the indissolubility of marriage see especially David d'Avray, *Medieval Marriage: Symbolism and Society* (Oxford, 2005), pp. 74–130, and Shannon McSheffrey, *Love and Marriage from Late Medieval London: Introduction and Translations* (Kalamazoo, 1995), pp. 5–7. For more on Wyclif's views on the entire subject see Stephen Penn, "Sacraments," in Ian Christopher Levy (ed.), *A Companion to John Wyclif, Late Medieval Theologian* (Leiden, 2006), pp. 241–91 (pp. 281–82).

75. See, for instance, Wyclif's attitude to the conjugal "debt of the body" in *De mandatis divinis* (1375–76), discussed by Penn, "Sacraments," p. 281.

76. On such views as they actually did express, see McSheffrey, *Gender and Heresy*, pp. 82–87; Elliott, "Lollardy and the Integrity of Marriage"; and Henry Hargreaves, "Sir John Oldcastle and Wycliffite Views on Clerical Marriage," *MÆ* 42 (1973): 141–46. A much fuller discussion is included in Patrick Hornbeck's Oxford D.Phil. thesis (in progress), "The Development of Heresy: Doctrinal Variation in English 'Lollard' Dissent, 1381–1521."

77. *Registrum Johannis Trefnant*, ed. Capes, p. 346.

78. For a lucid account of the entire process, see McSheffrey, *Marriage, Sex, and Civic Culture*, pp. 40–47.

79. McSheffrey terms him "unenthusiastic" about clerical celibacy; *Gender and Heresy*, p. 82.

80. *Opera minora*, ed. Loserth, p. 191.

81. *Doctrinale*, iii.411–12; cf. ii.745–56. For Wyclif's views see *De officio pastoralis*, ed. G. V. Lechler (Leipzig, 1863), pp. 11 and 46, and the reference given in the previous note.

82. This is Netter's usual method; however, here only a tiny amount of Wycliffite material is presented in contrast to a vast amount of orthodox refutation of earlier versions of the relevant heresies.

83. *English Wycliffite Writings*, ed. Hudson, p. 25. For similar associations of sodomy and anticlericalism elsewhere in late-medieval Europe, see Helmut Puff, "Localizing Sodomy: 'The Priest and Sodomite' in Reformation Germany and Switzerland," *Journal of the History of Sexuality*, 8 (1997), 165–95.

84. The notion that "ese, etynge, and drynkyne" give occasion to lechery is of course a moral commonplace—to be found, for example, in Chaucer's *Parson's Tale*, X(II) 950. See further the particularly full account in Peraldus, *Summa vitiorum*, tract. III, pars iii, cap. 1 (*Summa*, ii.13v), which alludes to sodomy as a branch of lechery, citing Ezekiel 16.

85. We have already drawn on this passage with reference to the Pardoner's problematic sexuality; cf. Chapter 2 above.

86. And also in *Of prelates*; Wyclif, *English Works*, ed. Matthew, p. 100.

87. Wyclif's mouthpiece Phronesis expresses a similar viewpoint in the *Dialogus*: young men in "private religion," separated from women and living a voluptuous and leisurely life, turn to sodomy. *Dialogus*, ed. Lechler, p. 206.

88. *Of Weddid Men and Wifs and of Here Children Also*, ed. Eve Salisbury, *The Trials and*

Joy of Marriage (Kalamazoo, 2002), p. 192. The doctrine in this text is largely orthodox, as Salisbury says (pp. 19, 20). Indeed, Anne Hudson believes that its Lollard credentials are questionable; *Premature Reformation*, p. 425. My own view is that parts of it are definitely Lollard.

89. *Revelaciones*, VII.12.21; in *Den Heliga Birgittas Revelaciones Bok VII*, ed. Birger Bergh (Uppsala, 1967), p. 148; *Life and Selected Revelations*, tr. Kezel, p. 179.

90. On the cultural suppression of the clerical wife, see especially Dyan Elliott's chapter "The Priest's Wife: Female Erasure and the Gregorian Reform," in her *Fallen Bodies*, pp. 81–106.

91. *Revelaciones*, VII.10.16–17, ed. Bergh, p. 139; *Life and Selected Revelations*, tr. Kezel, p. 173.

92. *Revelaciones*, VII.10.13, ed. Bergh, pp. 138–9; *Life and Selected Revelations*, tr. Kezel, pp. 172–73.

93. As has been noted by Blamires, "Wife of Bath and Lollardy," p. 232, who infers that we are not dealing with a "thoroughly formulated Lollard tenet." The best that Dymmok can come up with is the suggestion that the Lollards saw clerical celibacy as working against women's interest inasmuch as it limited the number of marriage partners available to them—a ridiculous proposition, he claims, for women who want to marry can find plenty of eligible men, and therefore no injury or *prejudicium* is perpetrated against them. *Liber contra XII errores et hereses lollardorum*, ed. Cronin, p. 74.

94. Dymmok interprets it as referring to lesbianism and bestiality—and also abortion, along with the murder of children before they can be baptized. *Liber contra XII errores et hereses lollardorum*, ed. Cronin, p. 273; cf. our discussion of Dymmok's own views on the matter, at the end of Chapter 2.

95. *Selections from English Wycliffite Writings*, ed. Hudson, p. 28.

96. For a summary account of Cathar belief on this subject, see Lambert, *Medieval Heresy*, pp. 55–56, 107, 111; and also Lambert, *The Cathars*, pp. 12, 76, 151, 159, 160, 205.

97. Colish, *Peter Lombard*, p. 628.

98. *Of Weddid Men and Wifis*, ed. Salisbury, p. 192.

99. See, for example, Bernard Gui, *Manuel de l'Inquisiteur*, ed. Mollat, p. 18. Of course, Catharism had been well and truly crushed on the continent long before Chaucer's lifetime, and in any case it had never made any significant inroads into England. For a rare (twelfth-century) incursion, see Peter Biller, "William of Newburgh and the Cathar Mission to England," in D. Wood (ed.), *Life and Thought in the Northern Church c. 1100–c. 1700: Essays in Honour of Claire Cross*, Studies in Church History, Subsidia, 12 (Woodbridge, 1999), pp. 11–30; see further his later article, "The Earliest Heretical Englishwomen," in J. Wogan-Brown et al. (eds.), *Medieval Women: Texts and Contexts in Late Medieval Britain. Essays for Felicity Riddy* (Turnhout, 2000), pp. 363–76. However, its dangers had been written about at considerable length, and clerks (such as the author of *Of Weddid Men and Wifis*) could have retained paranoid fantasies about its continuing threat. Cf. the possible imposition of a Cathar heresy (concerning metempsychosis) on Lollardy in one of the anti-Brut *quaestiones*, discussed in Chapter 3 above.

100. Cf. Lambert, *Medieval Heresy*, p. 107.

101. *Of Weddid Men*, ed. Salisbury, pp. 192–93. Wyclif himself set virginity above marriage in *De civili dominio*, ed. Poole and Loserth, i.167. But see n. 143 below.

102. On Lollard distrust of vows see Hudson, *Premature Reformation*, pp. 308, 496–97.

103. *Of Weddid Men*, ed. Salisbury, p. 193.

104. Cf. Anne Hudson, "The Examination of Lollards," in her *Lollards and Their Books*, pp. 125–40 (p. 134, item 39).

105. *Fasciculi zizaniorum*, pp. 420–21, 425, 426. The trial, and White's execution, took place in 1428.

106. White wrote *tractatus et libelli*, and *plures libros*, according to the *Fasciculi zizaniorum*, pp. 423, 432; cf. Netter, *Doctrinale*, iii.416. Netter is of no help here, since he does not seem to have had access to any of these documents. When he quotes White's views (on subjects other than clerical marriage, it should be noted) he is quoting verbatim from the *conclusiones* which form part of the trial record as recorded in the *Fasciculi zizaniorum*, pp. 417–32; with this compare *Doctrinale*, iii.789–90, 939–41. At *Doctrinale*, iii.983 Netter refers back to those *conclusiones* as being White's *libellus*. He was present at White's trial; on the substantial presence of White in the *Doctrinale* see Aston, "William White's Lollard Followers," pp. 85–

107. On the relationship between the Kentish and East Anglian Lollards see especially Aston, "William White's Lollard Followers," *passim*. Several Kentish Lollards, fleeing from prosecution by Archbishop Chichele, escaped to the Norwich area, to be arrested and tried by Bishop Alnwick. White's heretical evangelizing there had gone back earlier, however, probably to c. 1425 (Aston, pp. 86–87).

108. *Norwich Heresy Trials*, ed. Tanner, p. 57 (cf. p. 53).

109. They are: Isabella Davy (*Heresy Trials*, ed. Tanner, p. 64), John Burell (pp. 73, 77), John Skyland de Bergh (p. 148), William Bate (pp. 158, 160), Edmund Archer (p. 166), and Richard Clerk (p. 192).

110. This cannot be attributed solely to the influence of William White, of course. Another priest, Hugh Pye, seems to have had an important role, though his importance has been obscured to modern scholarship by the loss of the trial record. Cf. Aston, "William White's Lollard Followers," pp. 81–82.

111. *Norwich Heresy Trials*, ed. Tanner, p. 141.

112. They are: Margery Baxter (*Norwich Heresy Trials*, ed. Tanner, p. 46), John Skylly (pp. 52, 57), John Godesell (p. 61), Sibilla Godsell (p. 67), John Pyrye (p. 71), John Kynget (p. 81), Robert Cavell (p. 95), John Reve (pp. 107–8, 111), Richard Knobbing (p. 115), Richard Grace (p. 121), Baldwin Cowper (p. 126), Matilda, wife of Richard Fleccher (p. 131), John Eldon (p. 135), John Skyland (p. 147), William Hardy (p. 153), William Bate (pp. 158, 160), Edmund Archer (p. 165), John Pert (p. 170), Thomas Mone (pp. 177, 179), John Fynche (pp. 182–83, 185), John Wroxham (p. 189), Robert Gryggys (p. 196), Isabella Chapleyn (p. 199), and William Masse (p. 205).

113. *Norwich Heresy Trials*, ed. Tanner, p. 183.

114. *Fasciculi zizaniorum*, pp. 391–92. On Lavenham's role here see Hudson, "John Purvey," pp. 85–110 (pp. 91–92).

115. *Decretales Gregorii IX*, Lib. IV, tit. i, cap. 31, in *Corpus iuris canonici*, ed. Friedberg, ii.672.

116. *Lib. sent.* IV, dist. xxvii, cap. 3 (ii.422–23). As Thomas Aquinas put it in his *Sentences* commentary, "Consent to conjugal union if expressed in the words of the future does not make a marriage, but [is rather] a promise of marriage." In *IV Sent.*, dist. XXVII, qu. 2, art. 1 (*utrum sponsalia convenienter dicantur futurarum nuptiarum promissio*), solutio; *Aquinatis opera*, vii.2.931.

117. One of the consequences of this was that, if a man contracted a first marriage but left it unconsummated but subsequently contracted a second marriage which was consummated, the second marriage was the valid one.

118. On the disagreements between Gratian and Peter Lombard concerning what constituted a binding marriage agreement, see R. H. Helmholz, *Marriage Litigation in Medieval England* (Cambridge, 1974), p. 26.

119. Here I adopt a phrase which, in the view of Anne Hudson, may be regarded—in some contexts at least—as part of a distinctively Lollard discourse. See Hudson, "A Lollard Sect Vocabulary?" p. 167.

120. *Fasciculi zizaniorum*, pp. 391–92. The legal "test-cases" I discuss here, and in the following pages, may seem somewhat extreme and far-fetched. However, some actual cases were even more bizarre, as is brought out well by Pedersen's analysis of ecclesiastical court records from late-medieval York; *Marriage Disputes in Medieval England*, esp. pp. 61–83, 105–18. See further McSheffrey's evidence from London; *Marriage, Sex, and Civic Culture*, esp. pp. 110–20, and also her *Love and Marriage from Late Medieval London*.

121. Cf. *Literas tuas*, in *Decretales Gregorii IX*, Lib. II, tit. xiii, cap. 13; *Corpus iuris canonici*, ed. Friedberg, ii.286–88.

122. *Fasciculi zizaniorum*, p. 391.

123. Aquinas, *In IV Sent.*, dist. XLII, qu. 1, art. 1: *utrum spiritualis cognatio matrimonium impedit*, conclusio; *Aquinatis opera*, vii.2.1049.

124. These remarks may have been prompted by actual historical circumstances. Richard Firth Green speculates that Purvey had in mind the dubious legality of John of Gaunt's marriage to Katherine Swynford (since Gaunt was the godfather of Katherine's daughter Blanche, "the parties stood within the prohibited degree of spiritual affinity"), and the problematic nature of any claim to the throne which their bastard son, John Beauford, might have had. "John Purvey and John of Gaunt's Third Marriage," *MS 66* (2004), 363–70.

125. *Dialogus*, ed. Lechler, p. 325.

126. Thomas Aquinas is one among many of those commentators who held that that nothing indicates consent more clearly than sexual intercourse (assuming that it is undertaken willingly, of course). It follows that, in the judgment of the Church, carnal intercourse subsequent to betrothal is declared to make a marriage—unless there appear clear signs of deceit or fraud. *In IV Sent.*, Dist. XXVIII, qu. 1, art. 2: *Utrum carnalis copula post verba de futuro consensum experimentia facit matrimonium*; *Aquinatis opera*, vii.2.938–39.

127. *Dialogus*, ed. Lechler, p. 324. Phronesis cannot see how the devil managed to introduce such trickeries, unless he somehow managed to interrupt holy exhortation and preaching of a kind which would help the law of conscience in matters relating to matrimony.

128. *Doctrinale*, ii.766–72.

129. This argument was a conventional one. Aquinas notes that some persons are unable to express their mutual consent in words, “through being dumb or because they speak different languages,” but there is no problem here, for they can plight themselves to one another “by signs, and such signs count as words.” One of the crucial points here is that some public manifestation of consent should be made. *In IV Sent.*, dist. XXVII, qu. 1, art. 2, quaestiunc. 2; *Aquinatis opera*, vii.2.928.

130. *Doctrinale*, ii.766–67. Cf. Augustine, *De baptismo contra Donatistas*, III.xvi.21; *PL* 43, col. 149.

131. *Doctrinale*, ii.767–68; cf. *Confessiones*, XI, cap. 18 (24). Netter returns to Augustinian time-theory at *Doctrinale*, ii.769–70, and yet again at col. 772.

132. *Doctrinale*, ii.768. Cf. Seneca, *De brevitate vitae*, cap. ix.1, and Cicero, *De senectute*, xviii.69.

133. Turning to the sacraments other than marriage, Netter notes that they too are conferred in words *de praesenti*. In the case of baptism, Christ did not instruct us to say in words *de futuro*, “I will baptize you in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit.” In the case of the sacrament of the altar, he did not say, “You will take and you will eat, this will be my body” (cf. Matthew 26:26). Neither did he say “you will preach the Gospel to all creatures”; rather he instructed his followers to do it presently (cf. Mark 16:15). Netter then draws on Hugh of St. Victor’s *De sacramentis* for material which further calls in question the value of *verba de futuro* in marriage contracts: “He who promises does not yet do; but he who does, already does what he does. . . . He then who has promised that he would take a wife, nevertheless has not yet taken a wife, and she who promised that she would wed, has not yet wed. . . .” *Doctrinale*, ii.769–70. Cf. *De sacramentis*, ii.xi.5; *PL* 176, col. 486A–B, tr. Roy J. Deferrari, *Hugh of St. Victor on the Sacraments of the Christian Faith* (Cambridge, Mass., 1951), p. 330.

134. *Decretales Gregorii IX*, Lib. IV, tit. i: *de sponsalibus et matrimoniis*, cap. xxvi; ed. Friedberg, *Corpus iuris canonici*, ii.670–71.

135. *In IV Sent.*, dist. XXVII, qu. 1, art. 2, quaestiunc. 3; *Aquinatis opera*, vii.2.928–29. The initial question asks whether, in the absence of inward consent, a marriage is made by consent expressed in words *de praesenti*.

136. *In IV Sent.*, dist. XXVIII, art. 1, qu. 4: *utrum post carnalem copulam solum consensum de futuro sequentem, aliud matrimonium contrahi possit* (iv.426–27).

137. *In IV Sent.*, dist. XXVII, art. 1, qu. 2: *utrum ad contrahendum matrimonium necessarius sit verus viri, & mulieris consensus* (iv.413–14).

138. Here I have in mind, of course, the reception among layfolk of radical Lollard ideas concerning marriage. More generally, it should be noted that there is much evidence which suggests that “the laity knew the basic canon law rules of marriage well and that these rules were used proactively to initiate, legalise and sometimes dissolve marriages among the laity.” This is well brought out (using evidence from York) in Pedersen’s chapter “Lay Knowledge of the Law of Marriage” in his *Marriage Disputes in Medieval England*, pp. 59–83. Sometimes there appears to be some confusion among layfolk regarding technical legal distinctions: but in such instances it is often unclear if we are dealing with genuine misunderstanding or whether the individuals in question were knowingly manipulating the law for their own ends.

139. McSheffrey, *Marriage, Sex, and Civic Culture*, pp. 25–27.

140. The grim rigour of this (inferred) proposition is, however, belied by Wyclif’s actual statement that we cannot know if and when marriage has been approved by God—

presumably an implication of his oft-repeated warning that we cannot know for sure who is predestined to eternal glory and who is not. This refusal of practical implication is quite typical of Wyclif. See n. 148 below.

141. I am aware that this use of these terms runs the risk of anachronism, but, given the parallel and obviously comparable development of sexual puritanism in later Protestantism, it may be defended. Cf. Anne Hudson's reference to Lollard "puritanism" in her *Premature Reformation*, p. 387.

142. Such inference is supported by crucial remarks made by Wyclif in *De mandatis divinis* as well as the *Trialogus*; see n. 147 below.

143. *Doctrinale*, ii.759; cf. *Trialogus*, iv.20, ed. Lechler, p. 315. Many late-medieval canon lawyers and theologians had concluded that intercourse for the sake of having children was sinless (or, at least the sinful element therein was minimal); however, they justified marital sex on other grounds, such as the legal requirement (incumbent on both spouses) of paying the debt of one's body. Fundamentally, what made Wyclif different was his reluctance to accept any justification other than that of the *causa prolis*.

144. On which see especially Irvn M. Resnick, "Marriage in Medieval Culture: Consent Theory and the Case of Joseph and Mary," *American Society of Church History*, 69, no. 2 (2000), 350–71. In the *Opus evangelicum* which he left unfinished at the time of his death, Wyclif argues that marriage and virginity are not incompatible, and that the latter is possible within the former; *Opus evangelicum*, ed. J. Loserth and F. D. Matthew (London, 1895–96), i.46–47, cf. p. 171. Indeed, in the same treatise he specifically defends the perfection of the marriage of Mary and Joseph (*Opus evangelicum*, i.169; cf. the similar defense offered in a Lollard sermon of the early fifteenth century, *Lollard sermons*, ed. Gloria Cigman, EETS 294 [Oxford, 1989], p. 57). However, Wyclif's failure to address this issue in the *Trialogus* excursus gave Netter an opening which he promptly took.

145. Cf. the standard definition in Peter Lombard, *Lib. Sent.* IV, dist. XXXI, cap. 1 (i.442), which draws on Augustine, *De Genesi ad litteram*, ix, c. 7, n. 12 (PL 34, col. 397).

146. *Doctrinale*, ii.760. If, on the other hand, a marriage lacks *fides* and *sacramentum* then it is invalid.

147. Cf. the view expressed in Wyclif's earlier *De mandatis divinis* that (in Stephen Penn's words) "only for as long as sexual intercourse is practised as a means of procreation may it be regarded as a legitimate act. Wyclif therefore regards any other form of sexual activity sinful, and as a breach of the law of marriage" (Penn, "Sacraments," p. 280; *De mandatis divinis*, ed. J. Loserth and F. D. Matthew [London, 1922], pp. 347–48). When, in this treatise, Wyclif declares that marriage should prevent lechery, he has in mind lecherous words and thoughts as well as lecherous actions, and proceeds to describe the sexual act, even within marriage, as a type of genital-abuse. The traditional doctrine of the conjugal "debt of the body" (which husband and wife are legally bound to render unto each other) causes him evident discomfort, since he is reluctant to concede that intercourse may be justified as a legal obligation, irrespective of personal desire—for him, *luxuria* is the crucial problem, and marriage should bridle it rather than encourage it.

148. *Doctrinale*, ii.760–61; cf. *Trialogus*, ed. Lechler, p. 317. Wyclif's argument is, as one might expect, rather more convoluted and complex than this. Following the statement quoted by Netter, Phronesis explores the notion that many people who cannot produce children on account of some inadequacy could in fact do so if they were married to others—therefore, their failure to produce children is not their own fault. But what, then, of those who get married *knowing* they cannot have children? He leaves it to others to decide if under "this false cloak of marriage" they remain sinners and adulterers. However, Phronesis is prepared to say that a marriage is not legitimate unless God through his approval joins a couple together. Christ pertinently commands, "What God has joined together, let not man put asunder" (Matthew 19:6). However, because we cannot know if a union has been approved by God, many men remain uncertain as to whether the life they're living is meritorious or not. Therefore the manner of life of virgins who have never had such a union is blessed! (All that is being said here is that virgins are lucky not to have such problems.) It's easy to commit sin in such a case, given that people whose unions are not pleasing to God frequently marry *in facie ecclesiae*. This train of thought has implications for divorce: pseudofriars and chapter clergymen often eagerly divorce people whom God has joined together with His approval. Bad luck to them! This passage is fascinating because, yet again, we see Wyclif coping with the implications of his (frequent) admission that (special

revelation apart) we cannot know the will of God, and hence cannot tell with any certainty who is predestined to glory and who is foreseen as damned (cf. our discussion in Chapter 3 above, with specific reference to the “royal priesthood” of elect men and women, of the way in which this admission problematizes Wyclif’s theory of dominion). One can easily imagine an orthodox opponent saying: it is precisely because we cannot know how God regards specific human relationships that, in the making of marriage, we are obliged to rely on sensible, external signs.

149. *Doctrinale*, ii.761.

150. St. Paul’s “indulgence,” “pardon,” or “permission” for and concerning sexual acts was discussed above.

151. *De bono conjugali*, vi; PL 40, col. 377, tr. Charles Wilcox et al. and ed. Roy J. Deferrari, *Saint Augustine: Treatises on Marriage and Other Subjects*, The Fathers of the Church, 27 (New York, 1955), p. 16.

152. *Doctrinale*, ii.762.

153. *Doctrinale*, ii.762–65. The quotation is from Hugh of St. Victor, *De sacramentis*, ii.xi.3; PL 176, col. 481C–D, tr. Deferrari, pp. 325–26.

154. “Response to Alfred Thomas’s *The Wycliffite Woman*: Reading Women in Fifteenth-Century Bohemia,” in Olson and Kerby-Fulton (eds.), *Voices in Dialogue*, pp. 302–5. Accusation of sexual deviancy was, of course, a common means of demonizing heretics, as our relevant discussion in the previous chapter has made clear. To take one example among many: Bernard Gui accused the Waldensians of interpreting St. Paul’s statement “better to marry than to burn” (I Corinthians 7:9) as meaning that “it is better to appease desire by any shameful act than to be tempted inwardly in the heart (*intus in corde*).” Gui took this as evidence of a belief that “burning passion ought to be satisfied, in whatever shameful way.” *Manuel de l’Inquisiteur*, ed. Mollat, p. 50; tr. in Russell (ed.), *Religious Dissent*, p. 47.

155. Cf. Hudson, *Premature Reformation*, pp. 22, 37–38, 347–51, etc.

156. *Norwich Heresy Trials*, ed. Tanner, p. 166. Cf. the almost identical phrasing in the record of John Skylan’s trial (Tanner, p. 148).

157. Netter, *Doctrinale*, iii.630.

158. Cf. Anne Hudson, “A Lollard Mass,” in her *Lollards and Their Books*, pp. 111–23 (p. 121), and also Elliott, “Response,” p. 305 n.1. See further Kerby-Fulton, *Books Under Suspicion*, pp. 269–71, who (building on Hudson’s study) suggests that Ramsbury’s views may have been influenced by unorthodox sexual views channelled in association with the putative heresy of the “Free Spirit.” Could William White and his congregations also have been influenced by such views? That question is beyond the scope of this present study, and is complicated by present-day scholarly skepticism concerning the very existence of “a widespread, rightly organized sect of that name”; cf. Robert E. Lerner, *The Heresy of the Free Spirit in the Later Middle Ages* (Berkeley, 1972), pp. 5–6.

159. To return to the record of Edmund Archer’s trial; *Norwich Heresy Trials*, ed. Tanner, p. 166.

160. The way in which one can easily get from *multiplicatio prolis* to multiple marriage is well illustrated by a deduction which St Bonaventure raises in order to reject, viz. that if a woman is barren nature dictates that her partner can leave her and have a child with another woman; this is not *against* but *according to* nature (*non est contra, sed secundum naturam*). Bonaventure counters with the argument that propagation should be done in a manner which respects debt and order, and without causing injury to another (in this case, to the first wife). In *IV Sent.*, dist. XXXIII, art. 1, qu. 2: *utrum habere plures uxores sit contra legem naturae*, conclusio; *Bonaventurae opera*, iv. 750.

161. On a par with the infamous priest of Montaillou, Pierre Clergue, designated “a caricature of a Cathar believer” by Malcolm Lambert (*The Cathars*, p. 265), because of the brutally opportunistic way in which he exploited Cathar beliefs to seduce Béatrice de Planissoles and subsequently to keep their affair secret.

162. *Norwich Heresy Trials*, ed. Tanner, p. 166. So does John Skylan (p. 148).

163. “Wife of Bath and Lollardy,” p. 235.

164. For discussion see Minnis, *Oxford Guides to Chaucer: Shorter Poems*, pp. 417–20.

165. Cf. the discussion in my introductory chapter.

166. “The Wife of Bath and Her Tale,” *Leeds Studies in English*, 13 (1982), 42–55 (pp. 45, 47).

167. They are (in the *Riverside Chaucer*’s numbering): 44a–f, 575–84, 605–8, 609–12,

168. “The Variant Passages in the Wife of Bath’s Prologue and the Textual Transmission of *The Canterbury Tales*: The ‘Great Tradition’ Revisited,” in Lesley Smith and Jane H. M. Taylor (eds.), *Women, the Book and the Worldly* (Cambridge, 1995), pp. 85–101 (p. 86). Here Kennedy is going beyond the argument of Norman Blake (cf. n. 166), who draws attention to the disputed passages but believes that they “merely emphasise qualities already imputed to the Wife,” as she puts it (p. 86). See further Kennedy’s two later articles “Cambridge MS. Dd.4.24: A Misogynous Scribal Revision of the *Wife of Bath’s Prologue*,” *Ch.R* 30 (1995–96), 343–58, and “The Rewriting of the *Wife of Bath’s Prologue* in Cambridge Dd.4.24,” in T. A. Pendergast and B. Kline (eds.), *Rewriting Chaucer: Culture, Authority and the Idea of the Authentic Text, 1400–1602* (Columbus, Ohio, 1999), pp. 203–33.

169. Kennedy, “Variant Passages,” p. 98.

170. Kennedy, “Variant Passages,” p. 87.

171. As proposed by Kennedy, “Variant Passages,” p. 98.

172. As before, I quote this text (with my own punctuation added) from *William of Nassyngton, Speculum vitae*, compiled by Christine Robinson, consulted via the Oxford Text Archive, <http://ota.ahds.ac.uk>. Reproduced with Dr. Robinson’s permission. The knife analogy is a staple of the *Somme le Roi* tradition, featuring in Lorens d’Orléans’s description of the sixth branch of lechery (i.e., when a man acts unlawfully with his own wife); cf. for example *Myrour*, ed. Nelson, pp. 165–66. In *Ayenbite of Inwyte* (ed. Morris and Gradon, p. 48) and *Book of Vices and Virtues* (ed. Francis, p. 45) the implement in question is a man’s own sword. The fourteen branches of lechery, as specified by Lorens and his translators, were discussed in Chapter 2 above.

173. Cf. the similar statements in Middle English texts which translate and/or adapt the *Somme le Roi*: “When a man sekes noght elles / In yat dede bot to fulfille / His lust and his litcherous wille / He synnes yus thurgh litchery” (*Speculum Vitae*, ll. 11112–15; ed. Robinson); “whan men or wommen wolneþ noþing in suche workes but onliche for delite and likyng and lecherie,. . . in suche caas may a man or a womman synne” (*Vices and Virtues*, ed. Francis, p. 247); “whan a man or a womman sechþ noght ellis in þat dede but only þe fulfilling of his or hire lecherous lust, . . . þen he þat so doth synneþ” (*Myrour*, ed. Nelson, p. 186). See further the *Ayenbite of Inwyte*, ed. Morris and Gradon, p. 223. This sin may be either venial or mortal, depending on whether the deed is done within the boundaries of reason or not; cf. the scholastic discussions of this matter which I quote in the following paragraphs and notes.

174. *Riverside Chaucer*, p. 322. A little earlier Chaucer has explained that sexual intercourse may be justified on three grounds, “entente of engendrure of children” (that being the final cause or ultimate objective of matrimony), to yield each to the other “the dette of hire bodies,” and “to eschewe leccherie and vileynye” (p. 321). The issue of the sources of the *Parson’s Tale* is an extraordinarily complicated one. Basically, Chaucer seems to have drawn on both Raymond of Peñafort’s *Summa de poenitentia* and Peraldus’s *Summa vitorum*, but these works do not account for all of his materials. Other sources seem to have been involved, not least the anonymous *Summa virtutum de remediis anime* (produced shortly after 1241) which seems to underlie his account of the remedial virtues (which are directly opposed to the seven deadly sins). Either Chaucer brought together extracts from a remarkably wide range of treatises on the virtues and vices, or he used a compilation or compilations which have not yet been identified, or the truth lies somewhere in between. Cf. the summary account in the *Riverside Chaucer*, pp. 956–57, and Siegfried Wenzel’s introduction to his edition of the *Summa virtutum de remediis anime* (Athens, Ga., 1984).

175. On the technical—and changing—meaning of the notion of “marital affection,” see especially John T. Noonan, “Marital Affection in the Canonists,” *Studia Gratiana*, 12 (1967), 479–509. Initially used to express willingness to transfer property through marriage, it “became the word used to describe an internalised ongoing psychological process in the emotional involvement of one person [with] another”; Pedersen, *Marriage Disputes in Medieval England*, pp. 174–75. However, Pedersen’s chapter on “Marital Affection” (from which I have taken this quotation) makes it abundantly clear that the term’s original connection with property continued to operate through the later medieval legal system.

176. *Adversus Iovinianum*, i.49; PL 23, col. 281A–B. Cf. John T. Noonan, *Contraception: A History of Its Treatment by Catholic Theologians and Canonists* (Cambridge, Mass., 1965), p. 47. The tangles medieval scholars got into when trying to explain what “too ardent love”

actually meant are well illustrated by James Gordley, "Ardr quaerens intellectum: Sex Within Marriage According to the Canon Lawyers and Theologians of the Twelfth and Thirteenth Centuries," *Zeitschrift der Savigny-Stiftung für Rechtsgeschichte*, Kanonistische Abteilung 83 (1997), 305–32 (pp. 324–31). This article is a useful introduction to the entire subject demarcated by its title, but I would question Gordley's claim that Chaucer attributed an exceptionally "stern" and "grim" view of marital sex to his Parson; in my own opinion, that view had ample precedent in conventional doctrine and has to be read in relation to the other views which accompany it in the *Parson's Tale*.

177. Lib. IV, dist. XXXI, cap. 5: *de excusatione coitus quae fit per haec bona*, in Peter Lombard, *Lib. sent.*, ii.446–47.

178. Cf. her discussion in Peter Lombard, p. 611.

179. In *IV Sent.*, dist. XXXI, qu. 2, art. 3: *utrum aliquis peccet mortaliter cognoscens uxorem non intendens aliquod matrimonii bonum, sed solam delectationem*; Aquinatis opera, vii.2.958.

180. Bonaventure agrees, arguing that the satisfaction of desire within marriage in such a way is venial sin, but if a couple come together with pleasure as the ultimate and determining objective, then we are dealing with mortal rather than venial sin. In *IV Sent.*, dist. XXXI, art. 2, qu. 3: *utrum coire cum uxore ratione concupiscentiae satiandae sit semper peccatum mortale*, conclusio; *Bonaventurae opera*, iv.726. Addressing the question of whether the marriage goods excuse coitus, he explains that, while "all Catholics" say that the sacrament of marriage does indeed excuse from mortal sin, there are two opinions concerning the exact *modus excusandi*. Some say that marriage turns mortal sin into venial sin (the sexual act outside marriage is definitely mortal sin) while others say that when a couple have sex for the purpose of procreating children this is without any sin (an opinion which Bonaventure finds in Augustine and regards as the more consonant with reason and piety). In *IV Sent.*, dist. XXXI, art. 2, qu. 1: *utrum coitus propter prolem possit esse omni culpa*, conclusio; *Bonaventurae opera*, iv.723.

181. Aquinas, In *IV Sent.*, dist. XXXI, qu. 1, art. 1 (*utrum matrimonium debeat habere aliqua bona quibus excusetur*), solutio; Aquinatis opera, vii.2.954.

182. Charles J. Reid, Jr., *Power over the Body, Equality in the Family: Rights and Domestic Relations in Medieval Canon Law* (Grand Rapids, Mich., 2004), p. 115.

183. In *IV Sent.*, dist. XXXI, qu. 2, art. 1 (*Utrum actus matrimonii excusari possit etiam sine matrimonii bonis*), solutio; Aquinatis opera, vii.2.156–57.

184. Augustine, *De bono coniugali*, vi.6; *PL* 40, col. 377. Cf. Peter Lombard, *Lib. sent.*, IV, dist. XXXII, cap. 1 (ii.452).

185. *Dives and Pauper*, i.2, ed. P. Barnum, EETS OS 280 (Oxford, 1980), p. 58. Similar (albeit shorter) lists are characteristic of the *Somme le Roi* tradition; see, for example, *Ayenbite of Inwyte*, ed. Morris and Gradon, pp. 223–25; *Vices and Virtues*, ed. Francis, pp. 247–49; *Myroure*, ed. Nelson, pp. 186–88.

186. On Chaucer's possible knowledge of this text see J. L. Lowes, "Chaucer and the *Miroir de Mariage*," *MP* 8 (1910–11), 165–86.

187. *Œuvres complètes*, ed. Le Marquis de Queux de Saint-Hilaire and Gaston Raynaud (Paris, 1878–1903), ix.177.

188. Hence Joseph Mogan can remark that "her sensuality is too abundant to serve any but her own ends"; "Chaucer and the *Bona matrimonii*," *Chr* 4 (1970), 123–41 (p. 138). Cf. Alisoun's emphasis on her personal "profit" and "ese" (214), the latter term intimating the pleasure she takes in conjugal relations. This emphasis could hardly be farther from St. Augustine's belief that "a woman's sole purpose in marrying should be motherhood" (*Contra Faust*. xix.26).

189. Discussed below, in the following section.

190. Kennedy, "Rewriting," p. 211.

191. Blamires, "Wife of Bath and Lollardy," pp. 232–34. Blamires's argument here is, quite rightly, tentative, given that there is so little material to work with.

192. From the record of John Skylan de Bergh's trial; *Norwich Heresy Trials*, ed. Tanner, p. 148. Cf. the opinion attributed to Edmund Archer, as quoted on p. 281 above.

193. Dymmok, *Liber contra XII errores*, ed. Cronin, p. 275.

194. It should be added that on one occasion a "great clerk" asks Margery Kempe how the words *Crescite et multiplicamini* should be understood; while recognizing the literal sense of the text, she offers an allegorical interpretation (relating to the begetting of "frute gostly," i.e., "vertu") which deftly justifies her own holy work. *Book of Margery Kempe*, i.51, ed.

Windeatt, pp. 243–44. Did Margery's interlocutor hope that she would come out with some rash remark which could easily be taken as attacking chastity and/or supporting sexual promiscuity? Blamires suggests that here we may detect the faint impress of a Lollard "test question" that never got fully developed ("Wife of Bath and Lollardy," p. 233). It is, however, not altogether clear whether Lollardy is the issue here (though, of course, on other occasions Margery was indeed accused of having fallen into that heresy).

195. *Norwich Heresy Trials*, ed. Tanner, p. 91.

196. *In IV Sent.*, dist. XXXIII, qu. 1, art. 1: *utrum habere plures uxores sit contra legem naturae*, solutio; *Aquinatis opera*, vii.2.967.

197. *Nicomachean Ethics*, viii.12.

198. Cf. *Politics* ii.3 and 4.

199. Aquinas emphasizes that this dispensation was indeed special. Generally speaking, and certainly nowadays, we should abide by a law that prescribes one wife—this law "was framed not by man but by God, nor was it ever given by word or in writing, but was imprinted on the heart, like other things belonging in any way to the natural law." *In IV Sent.*, dist. XXXIII, qu. 1, art. 2: *utrum habere plures uxores potuerit aliquando esse licitum*, solutio; *Aquinatis opera*, vii.2.969.

200. *In IV Sent.*, dist. XXXIII, qu. 1, art. 1, ad 8um; *Aquinatis opera*, vii.2.968.

201. *In IV Sent.*, dist. XXVII, qu. 1, art. 2 (ii.535–36).

202. Cf. yet again *Politics*, ii.3 and 4.

203. On the meanings of "bigamy" in late-medieval canon law see especially d'Avray, *Medieval Marriage*, pp. 131–67.

204. *Doctrinale*, iii.417.

205. This is indebted to *Roman de la Rose*, 6929–44 (ed. Lecoy, i.213), a part of the poem which will be discussed in the following section of this chapter.

206. It is tempting to compare this with some of the arguments used by Servasanto da Faenza O.F.M., resident at Santa Croce in Florence, in rejecting Cathar teaching about marriage: "Therefore if nature makes members which are apt and suitable for generation, and it is not making them as superfluous things, or to no purpose, therefore generation is intended by nature. But that which is natural is not a sin, if it is done in the manner for which it is intended. Therefore the act of the generative [power] is not in itself a sin." Cf. David d'Avray, "Some Franciscan Ideas About the Body," *Archivum Franciscanum Historicum*, 84 (1991), 343–63 (p. 354). Making Alisoun into some sort of opponent of Catharism is, however, difficult on two counts. First, this heresy never took root in English soil. That argument, however, is not as decisive as it might look, given the amount of writing about continental Catharism which was available in late-medieval England; the heresy, therefore, may be said to have existed in the heads of some Englishmen rather than (so to speak) on the ground (cf. n. 99 above). Secondly, and much more decisively, is Alisoun's use of the fact that "membres" were purposefully created to defend marital *amorous love* in a way which is quite beside Servasanto's point, and which he certainly would have rejected—the sexual act may be, in itself, not a sin, but that does not mean that every possible sexual act is free from sin!

207. *Adversus Jovinianum*, i.36 (*PL* 23, col. 272 C–D).

208. Beverly Kennedy believes that, if the disputed passages in Cambridge, University Library, MS Dd.4.24 are discounted, "we have no evidence that" Alisoun "has ever committed fornication or adultery." Leaving the men she subsequently married out of the calculation, "Chaucer's text" is "deliberately ambiguous on the subject" of Alisoun's "sexual behaviour outside of marriage" ("Variant Passages," p. 97). What, then, of the General Prologue's statement that she had married five husbands "at chirche dore," "Withouthen oother compaignye in youthe" (I(A) 460–61), which seems to hint that her favors were distributed beyond the men who became her husbands? This too is ambiguous, in Kennedy's view. *Either* she had no friends or lovers apart from her husbands *or* she had many friends or lovers not counting her husbands, and "Chaucer's text gives the reader no help at all in deciding which of these contradictory meanings to choose" ("Rewriting," p. 206). But surely the text is weighted in one direction. After all, this character has done much "wandrynge by the weye" (improbable as an allusion to sex within marriage), knows the "remedies of love" by "chauce" (i.e., in practice), and performs well that "olde daunce" (I(A) 467, 475–76). Her faux-naïf claim that she does not understand what Christ meant when he referred to the Samaritan woman's last "husband" as not really being her husband (i.e., he was her lover) is

also highly revealing (17–19; cf. p. 254 above). As in the cases of her predecessors Dipsas and La Vielle, Alisoun's sexual "experience" defies the boundaries of wedlock.

209. Jan M. Ziolkowski, "The Obscenities of Old Women: Vetularity and Vernacularity," in Ziolkowski (ed.), *Obscenity: Social Control and Artistic Creation in the European Middle Ages* (Leiden, 1998), pp. 73–89 (p. 73).

210. *Catholicon*, s.v. *obsenus*. This extends Hugutio of Pisa's explanation in his *Derivationes*, ed. Cecchini et al., ii.216 (C 130 14). See further Robert Maltby, *A Lexicon of Ancient Latin Etymologies* (Leeds, 1991), p. 421.

211. "Anything shameful is called *obscaenum*, because it ought not to be said openly except on the *scaena* ('stage')": *De lingua Latina*, viii.96, ed. R. G. Kent (Cambridge, Mass., 1938), ii.351.

212. *Differentiarum, sive de proprietate sermonum*, lib. 1: *De differentiis verborum*, in PL 83, col. 10A.

213. On this passage see further David Hult's discussion, which argues for the possibility of an innuendo relating to fellatio—the words or the things are not well thought of "in the mouth of a courteous girl": "Language and Dismemberment: Abelard, Origen, and the *Romance of the Rose*," in Kevin Brownlee and Sylvia Huot (eds.), *Rethinking the "Romance of the Rose"*: Text, Image, Reception (Philadelphia, 1992), pp. 101–30 (p. 116).

214. "The Obscenities of Old Women," p. 73.

215. Here I alter Frances Horgan's translation, by using "balls," "pricks," and "cock" in preference to her terms "testicles," "testes," and "penis," to bring out the deliberately obscene force of Jean's language.

216. On the *proprie/improprie* distinction see Minnis, *Magister amoris*, pp. 119–63.

217. *Le Livre des trois vertus*, ed. Charity Cannon Willard with Eric Hicks (Paris, 1989), pp. 45–6, 192, 199; tr. Sarah Lawson, *The Treasure of the City of Ladies, or the Book of the Three Virtues* (Harmondsworth, 1985), pp. 58, 159–60, 163.

218. Summarized from *Amores* i.8, as translated by Peter Green, *Ovid: The Erotic Poems* (Harmondsworth, 1982), pp. 99–100.

219. *Le Débat*, ed. Hicks, p. 15; cf. Baird and Kane, p. 49 (here altered).

220. *Le Débat*, ed. Hicks, p. 130; tr. Baird and Kane, p. 129.

221. *Le Débat*, ed. Hicks, p. 61; tr. Baird and Kane, pp. 71–72. Later Gerson calls her a "damned Old Woman, who ought to be judged to the punishment of the pillory" (Hicks, p. 86; Baird and Kane, p. 90).

222. Shulamith Shahar, *Growing Old in the Middle Ages*, tr. Yael Lotan (London, 1997), pp. 17–18. According to the *De amore* of Andreas Capellanus, women may love until they are fifty, but Froissart's *Le Joli Buisson de jonece* asserts that a person is too old for love at 35. Pope Innocent III, in his *De miseria condicionis humane* (a treatise well known to Chaucer, as already noted), stated that the human condition was so wretched that few reach the age of 40, and very few survive until 60. My best guess is that Alisoun is in the early phase of her *aetas diminuendi* ("age of decline"); Vincent of Beauvais, following Avicenna, judged that to start around 35 or 40 and to extend until 60, when the *aetas minuendi* ("the age of enfeeblement") began. Cf. Shahar, pp. 16–17.

223. Helen R. Lemay, *Women's Secrets: A Translation of pseudo-Albertus Magnus' "De secretis mulierum" with commentaries* (Albany, N.Y., 1992), p. 129. One of the commentaries on this treatise notes that "old women ought not to be permitted to play with children and kiss them, because they poison them to such a degree that sometimes they die" (p. 131).

224. *Le Livre des trois vertus*, ed. Willard, p. 192; tr. Lawson, pp. 159–60.

225. Ed. Livingston, *Le Jongleur Gautier le Leu*, pp. 169. I cite once again the translation of Hellman and O'Gorman, rpt. in *The Canterbury Tales*, ed. Kolve and Olson, pp. 320–26.

226. Cf. my use of this passage on p. 156 above.

227. *Lydgate and Burgh's Secrees of Old Philisoffres*, ed. R. Steele, EETS ES 66 (London, 1894, rep. 1973), p. 56. Burgh is discussing signs of disease in the genitals.

228. However, their unease with the passages in question is evident in their hypothesis that Chaucer inserted them in a single manuscript of the (already circulating) *Wife of Bath's Prologue*, "to meet the taste of some friend": *The Text of the Canterbury Tales Studied on the Basis of All Known Manuscripts* (Chicago, 1940), ii.193.

229. "The Wife of Bath and Her Tale," pp. 45, 47.

230. Cf. *MED*, s.v. *queint(e)* (n), s.v. 1; see further *queint(e)* (adj.).

231. L. D. Benson, "The "Queynte" Punning of Chaucer's Critics," in *SAC, Proceedings*, 1

(1984), 23–47.

232. In Cambridge, University Library, MS li.3.26 *queynte* is actually replaced with *conte*.

233. *Reliquiae antiquae*, ed. T. Wright and J. O. Halliwell (1845, rpt. New York, 1966), ii.280–82. For other (apparently) offensive uses of the term see the *MED*, s.v. *cunte*.

234. *Lanfrank's Science of Cirurgie*, ed. R. V. Fleischhacker, EETS 102 (London, 1894), p. 172.

235. His defender Pierre Col had pointed out that Jesus Christ himself had a member that one could honorably name (*nommer honnestement*). *Le Débat*, ed. Hicks, p. 96; tr. Baird and Kane, p. 99. Perhaps Col had in mind (though, if so, he certainly went beyond) Jerome, *Adversus Jovinianum*, i.36 (PL 23, col. 272 C–D). Cf. Chaucer's use of this Jerome passage at III(D) 139–41, as discussed above.

236. Cf. L.Y. Baird-Lange, "Trotula's Fourteenth-Century Reputation, Jankyn's Book, and Chaucer's Trot," *SAC* (1984), 245–56. The legendary Trotula was supposed to have been the wife and mother of physicians and to have taught at Salerno. However, Paul Kristeller emphasizes that there is no firm evidence of her professional status, family relationships, or even her historical existence. In the early fourteenth century, a number of women in southern Italy did receive royal medical licenses, but we cannot tell whether they attended, much less helped to teach, university courses. Cf. Kristeller, "Learned Women of Early Modern Italy: Humanists and University Scholars," in Patricia A. Labalme (ed.), *Beyond their Sex: Learned Women of the European Past* (New York, 1980), pp. 91–117; and also David F. Noble, *A World Without Women: The Christian Clerical Culture of Western Science* (New York, 1992), pp. 168–69. For a comprehensive study and edition of the Latin text (here identified as a composite of three independent works, each by a different author) see Monica Green, *The Trotula: A Medieval Compendium of Women's Medicine* (Philadelphia, 2001).

237. *The Knowing of Woman's Kind in Childing: A Middle English Version of Material derived from the "Trotula" and Other Sources*, ed. Alexandra Barratt (Turnhout, 2001), p. 44. In the version in Cambridge, University Library, MS li.6.33, the passage reads, "callid a cunte or priuete of the wombe" (ed. Barratt, p. 45). On this text see further Monica Green, "Obstetrical and Gynecological Texts in Middle English," *SAC* 14 (1992), 53–88 (esp. pp. 66–67). I am grateful to Professor H. A. Kelly for bringing the *bele chose* reference to my attention. It is not included in the *MED*, which presents Chaucer's usage of the term as unique; however, it does cite three occurrences in scientific contexts of "priue chose."

238. *Le Débat*, ed. Hicks, p. 117; tr. Baird and Kane, pp. 117–18.

239. In other words, the impact of those "proper" words would be determined by custom and the common usage of speech, which no individual speaker can overthrow.

240. Cited by C. Casagrande and S. Vecchio, *Les Péchés de la langue: Discipline et éthique de la parole dans la culture médiévale*, tr. P. Baillet (Paris, 1991), p. 282.

241. Cf. *Roman de la Rose*, 7076–85. On the *ad placitum* theory of language see Minnis, *Magister amoris*, pp. 140–45.

242. *Le Débat*, ed. Hicks, p. 14; tr. Baird and Kane, pp. 48–49. Cf. Howard Bloch, "Modest Maids and Modified Nouns: Obscenity in the *Fabliaux*," in Ziolkowski (ed.), *Obscenity*, pp. 292–307 (pp. 304–5).

243. The first of these, however, may be the addition of a fifteenth-century scribe.

244. As is, of course, well known; the parallels are listed in the *Riverside Chaucer's* notes, pp. 867–71 passim.

245. Cf. p. 250 above.

246. Lee Patterson, "'For the Wyves love of Bathe': Feminine Rhetoric and Poetic Resolution in the *Roman de la Rose* and the *Canterbury Tales*," *Speculum*, 58 (1983), 656–95 (p. 682).

247. Here I return to the etymologies from de'Balbi and Isidore of Seville, quoted on p. 294 above.

248. Cf. Derek Brewer (ed.), *Chaucer: The Critical Heritage* (London, 1978), i.129–30.

249. Cf. Brewer (ed.), *Chaucer: The Critical Heritage*, i.171 (cf. i.167).

250. *A Preface to Chaucer*, p. 321.

251. "Designing a Camel; or, Generalizing About the Middle Ages," *Tennessee Studies in Literature*, 22 (1977), 1–16 (p. 4).

252. Susan Crane, "The Writing Lesson of 1381," in Barbara Hanawalt (ed.), *Chaucer's England: Literature in Historical Context* (Minneapolis, 1992), pp. 201–21 (pp. 214–15). For these reasons, Crane believes that "we cannot understand her as a private subjectivity, nor

does she so understand herself ” (p. 214).

253. Crane, “The Writing Lesson,” pp. 215–16.

254. *Tractatus contra Benedictum*, iii.3, in *Guillelmi de Ockham opera politica*, vol. 3, ed. R. F. Bennett and H. S. Offler (Manchester, 1956), p. 231.

255. *Epistola liii.7* (Ad Paulinum, de studio scripturarum), *PL* 22, col. 544; tr. Fremantle et al., p. 99.

256. S. McGrade, J. Kilcullen, and M. Kempshall (eds.), *Cambridge Translations of Medieval Philosophical Tests*, vol. 2: *Ethics and Political Philosophy* (Cambridge, 2001), p. 160.

257. McGrade, Kilcullen, and Kempshall (eds.), *Ethics and Political Philosophy*, pp. 573–74.

258. Albert the Great, *In IV Sent.* dist. V, A, art.1, sed contra and solutio (xxix.104, 105). Cf. the relevant discussion in Chapter 1 above.

259. Here, and throughout this book, *Confessio amantis* references are to Macaulay’s edition.

260. I quote this text from *Sir Gawain: Eleven Romances and Tales*, ed. Thomas Hahn (Kalamazoo, 1995), pp. 47–70.

261. See also the *Marriage of Sir Gawain* (in *Sir Gawain: Eleven Romances*, ed. Hahn, pp. 359–71), wherein the loathly damsel has an eye “sett” where “shold have stood her mouth,” the other being “in her forehead,” along with a crooked nose and “foule awry” mouth. “A worse formed lady than shee was, / Never man saw with his eye” (57–64).

262. Shulamith Shahar, “The Old Body in Medieval Culture,” in Sarah Kay and Miri Rubin (eds.), *Framing Medieval Bodies* (Manchester, 1994), pp. 160–86 (p. 160).

263. Here I build upon the work of Anneke B. Mulder-Bakker, “The Prime of their Lives: Women and Age, Wisdom and Religious Careers in Northern Europe,” in Dor, Johnson, and Wogan-Browne (eds.), *New Trends in Feminine Spirituality*, pp. 215–36 (esp. pp. 220–22).

264. *The Life of Juliana of Mont-Cornillon*, tr. Barbara Newman, rev. ed. (Toronto, 1991), p. 30.

265. *Vita Catharinae Serensis*, I.ii.31, in *Die Legenda maior* (“*Vita Catharinae Serensis*”) des *Raimund von Capua*, ed. with a German translation and commentary by Jörg Jungmayr (Berlin, 2004), i.44–45.

266. *Vita Catharinae Serensis*, I.vii.71; ed. Jungmayr, i.96–97.

267. *Vita Catharinae Serensis*, I.vii.73; ed. Jungmayr, i.98–99.

268. Here I borrow a phrase used to describe Theseus’s old and wise (if somewhat lugubrious) father in the *Knight’s Tale*, I(A) 2447.

269. Alan Fletcher has remarked that “it is of heresy’s essence that, in common with the practice of literary fiction, it too dares to imagine and celebrate alternatives. This being so, the heretical impulse is necessarily partly commensurate with the creative one”; “Chaucer the Heretic,” p. 116. That is well said, but of course a practitioner of literary fiction does not inevitably, as he imagines and celebrates alternatives, come to adopt viewpoints which are identifiable as heretical. The gestures of difference involved in Chaucer’s presentation of the loathly damsel’s wisdom are an excellent case in point.

270. *Le Débat*, ed. Hicks, p. 130; tr. Baird and Kane, p. 129.

271. Here I draw on the entries for *soverainte* (n.) and *maistri(e)* in the *MED*.

272. *The Problem of Sovereignty in the Later Middle Ages* (Cambridge, 1963).

273. In his *Boece* Chaucer uses the word *gentilesse* to render what Boethius termed *nobilitas*. With *Consolatio philosophiae*, III pr. vi, 22–24 (ed. Stewart, Rand, and Tester, p. 254), cf. the *Boece*, III pr. vi. 32 (*Riverside Chaucer*, ed. Benson, p. 427). Compare also Jean de Meun’s use of *gentillece* in his earlier Boethius translation, which was a major influence on Chaucer’s. *Livres de Confort*, III pr. vi. 18; ed. V. L. Dedek-Héry, “Boethius’ *De Consolatione* by Jean de Meun,” *MS* 14 (1952), 165–275 (p. 214). The French and Vulgate Latin sources of this crucial *prosa* (to be discussed later in this chapter) may easily be compared in the parallel-text edition by T. W. Machan with Alastair Minnis, *Sources of the “Boece”* (Athens, Ga., 2005), pp. 104–7.

274. Cf. the resolution of the story, where it is emphasized that one of the requirements for breaking the spell was that the best of English knights should “geve me the sovereyntyé / Of alle his body and goodes, sycurly” (695–98).

275. Cf. also *The Marriage of Sir Gawain*, 151–55 (*Sir Gawain: Eleven Romances*, ed. Hahn, p. 367).

276. *Sir Gawain: Eleven Romances*, ed. Hahn, p. 65. Similar points are made in *The Marriage of Sir Gawain*, 159–66 (p. 367).

277. Gower, *Confessio amantis*, I, 1841–49; cf. *The Wedding of Sir Gawain and Dame Granelle*, 692, and *The Marriage of Sir Gawain*, 175–82 (*Sir Gawain: Eleven Romances*, ed. Hahn, pp. 66, 368).

278. On defensive and self-protective citation of authorities see Minnis, *Medieval Theory of Authorship*, pp. 193–98.

279. *De officio regis*, v, ed. A. W. Pollard and C. Sayle (London, 1887), p. 95; cf. C. J. Nederman and K. L. Forhan (eds.), *Medieval Political Theory—A Reader. The Quest for the Body Politic, 1100–1400* (London, 1993), p. 228.

280. As discussed in Chapter 3 above.

281. *Tractatus de potestate pape*, ed. Loserth, pp. 218–21. See further the excursus in the Lollard *Lanterne of Liht*, ed. Swinburn, p. 36: “What woodnes is þis, to boost of hooli places / & we oure silf to be suche viciouse foolis?” This is part of an attack on the “curiouse” adornment of churches.

282. Of course, I am not claiming that Chaucer had any direct knowledge of the passage from *De potestate pape* under discussion here. My purpose here is to engage in comparative analysis of a kind which brings out the fundamental differences in the ideologies underlying their treatments of the geographical location of grace.

283. Nicholas of Lyre, *Postilla litteralis*, in *Biblia glossata*, v. 1081.

284. These glosses are taken from the *Glossa ordinaria marginalis*, in *Biblia glossata*, v. 1076, 1081–82.

285. In the case of Grisilda, however, there is the added suggestion that a poor upbringing ensured “no likerous lust was thurgh hire herte yronne”; III(D) 214.

286. On Chaucer’s use of this commentary see Alastair Minnis, “Chaucer’s Commentator: Nicholas Trevet and the Boece,” in Alastair Minnis (ed.), *Chaucer’s “Boece” and the Medieval Tradition of Boethius* (Cambridge, 1993), pp. 83–166.

287. *De consolacione philosophiae*, ed. Stewart, Rand, and Tester, pp. 256–57.

288. *De consolacione philosophiae*, ed. Stewart, Rand, and Tester, pp. 252–55.

289. *Roman de la Rose*, ed. Lecoy, iii.58ff.

290. In similar (though more elevated) vein, William of Aragon’s *De nobilitate animi* (on which see below) defines “nobility of soul” as wisdom in speculation and diligence or zeal (*studiositas*) in behavior, whence philosophers and wise men may be deemed noble. *De nobilitate animi*, ed. Marvin L. Colker, *MS 23* (1961), 47–79 (pp. 55–56).

291. *Roman de la Rose*, 6459–92 (ed. Lecoy, i.198–202). For the argument that all of Jean’s “raw material” for this story was provided by glosses on *De consolacione philosophiae*, II pr. ii, 29–32, see my article “Aspects of the Medieval French and English Traditions of Boethius’ *De Consolacione Philosophiae*,” in M. T. Gibson (ed.), *Boethius: His Life, Thought and Influence* (Oxford, 1981), pp. 312–61 (pp. 328–33).

292. As I demonstrate in “Medieval French and English Traditions of Boethius,” pp. 334–37. The additional material probably came from Nicholas Trevet’s commentary on *De consolacione philosophiae*, II pr. ii, 29–32; ed. Stewart, Rand, and Tester, pp. 182–83.

293. For the identification of William as author of this treatise see M. Thomas, “Guillaume d’Aragon auteur du *Liber de nobilitate animi*,” *Bibliothèque de l’École des Chartes*, 106 (1945–46), 70–79. It is particularly interesting for its quotations (in Latin translation) of troubadour poetry. William also wrote a commentary on the *Consolatio*, the prologue to which was the primary source of Jean de Meun’s preface to his Old French Boethius; see Roberto Crespo, “Il Prologo alla traduzione della *Consolatio philosophiae* di Jean de Meun e il commento di Guglielmo d’Aragonia,” in W. Den Boer et al. (eds.), *Romanitas et Christianitas: Studia I. H. Waszink oblata* (Amsterdam, 1973), pp. 55–70.

294. *De nobilitate animi*, ed. Colker, p. 68.

295. On the significance of the *Economics* for doctrine of good family management in which a loving relationship is highly valued, see my article, “‘I speke of folk in seculer estaat’: Vernacularity and Secularity in the Age of Chaucer,” *SAC* 27 (2005), 21–54 (pp. 33–36).

296. This doctrine of complementarity bears a striking resemblance to Pope John Paul II’s 1995 *Apostolic Letter to Women*: “Woman complements man, just as man complements women: men and women are complementary. Womanhood expresses the ‘human’ as much as manhood does, but in a different and complementary way.” *Briefing: The Official Documentation Service of the Catholic Bishops’ Conferences of England and Wales and of Scotland*, 25, no. 7 (1995), 3–7 (p. 5).

297. Cf. *De consolacione philosophiae*, I pr. iv, 18–21; ed. Stewart, Rand, and Tester, pp. 146–47.

298. *De nobilitate animi*, ed. Colker, p. 61, cf. p. 49.

299. *De nobilitate animi*, ed. Colker, p. 65.

300. Dante's point here is that the moral virtue of Peter III of Aragon was not inherited by his sons, James II of Aragon and Frederick II of Sicily.

301. See J. L. Lowes, "Chaucer and Dante's *Convivio*," *MP* 13 (1915), 19–33, to which the following discussion is inevitably indebted. This remains the most important study of what Chaucer really did to *Il Convivio*.

302. *Il Convivio*, ed. Cordati, pp. 157, 169, 195, 196, 208, etc.

303. *Il Convivio*, IV, 20, ed. Cordati, pp. 226–27. I am not wholly convinced, however. Dante goes on to explain that God extends such grace to the soul of that man who has prepared himself well for its reception, this argument being made with the aid of Aristotle's *De anima*—and taking us some distance away from the Boethian (and Chaucerian) emphasis on the loss (rather than the acquisition and development) of nobility through "synful dedes."

304. *De consolacione philosophiae*, II pr. vii, 30–34 and III pr. iv, 34–25. Here as elsewhere in this book I follow the Loeb edition and translation by E. K. Rand and S. J. Tester (Cambridge, Mass., 1973). Use of the fire analogy to affirm the idea of intrinsic worth is discussed by Sheila Fisher, *Chaucer's Poetic Alchemy: A Study of Value and Its Transformation in "The Canterbury Tales"* (New York, 1988), pp. 40–43. Alcuin Blamires adds a fascinating reference, to a passage in Jean Buridan's commentary on Aristotle's *Politics* where the argument that women may act as judges, just as men do, is considered. Those who are members of the same species share one and the same mode of action (*operacio*). Since men and women are members of the same species, therefore both sexes can engage in the action of judgment. Buridan takes as proof of his major premise the fact that fire burns exactly the same whether here or in Persia. *In lib. polit. III*, qu. 26, in *Quaestiones in octo libros politicorum* (Oxford, 1640), p. 175; cf. Blamires, *Chaucer, Ethics, and Gender* (Oxford, 2006), p. 74. Here we may recall the radical use made of the same basic argument by the orthodox theologians who elaborated and rejected the thought of Walter Brut (as discussed in Chapter 3 above): since men and women are members of the same species, therefore women have the capacity for priestly power just as much as men. But Chaucer does not go anywhere near such an extreme formulation, being content to present (and leave intact) the proposition that virtue is no respecter of place, person, or gender. In its own terms, this is a potentially radical proposition, as may be indicated by contrasting it with the subsequent part of Buridan's *quaestio* (which is not discussed by Blamires). The schoolman proceeds to dismiss the argument from shared membership of the same species. A distinction is made between two types of action: a type which relates to the entire species and to every individual within it (such as seeing and eating) and a type which does not, being rather a matter of *proprietas* and *conditio*, i.e., particular quality and special condition or state (such as ruling and judging). Those latter activities appertain to the male of the species. Buridan's view is that it is not profitable for women to be judges because they are deficient in reason, cannot rule their passions, and give infirm counsel; as the Philosopher says in his *Economics*, they should not involve themselves in "civil" or political affairs (cf. William of Aragon's deployment of the same authority). Chaucer allows a more positive view of female reason, passion-control, and counsel.

305. Lowes, "Chaucer and Dante's *Convivio*," pp. 24, 20.

306. Dante hails Aristotle as "the master and leader of human reason" and among philosophical authorities the "most worthy of trust and obedience"; *Il Convivio*, IV, 6, ed. Cordati, p. 179. In contrast, Chaucer's main loyalty is to Boethius.

307. Howard Kaminsky, "Wyclifism as Ideology of Revolution," *Church History*, 32 (1963), 57–74.

308. Hurley, "*Scriptura Sola*: Wyclif and His Critics," pp. 286–87.

309. Wilks, "Predestination, Property, and Power," p. 24. Cf. our previous use of this quotation in discussion of the possible implications of Wycliffite doctrine of dominion for female ministry; p. 220 above.

310. Knighton, *Chronicon*, ii.152.

311. Cf. Margaret Aston's remarks, quoted on p. 243 above.

312. At the very least, further analysis of Chaucer's text would have revealed a considerable degree of deviation from what Jerome had actually argued, and if Thomas

Netter's association of Jovinian and William White may be taken as symptomatic, Alisoun and her creator could not have hidden behind the august cardinal.

313. Cf. the similar argument developed by Alan Fletcher: "whatever the reality," Chaucer could have been *perceived* "as having been sympathetic to Lollardy" ("Chaucer the Heretic," p. 117). Fletcher speculates that such perception would have been particularly dangerous after the "pivotal year" of 1399, as Chaucer neared his death (p. 119). Indeed, it is identified as the *cause* of Chaucer's death in a work which best fits the genre of the historical novel (though it is brim-full of splendid scholarship), *Who Murdered Chaucer? A Medieval Mystery*, by Terry Jones, with Robert Yeager, Terry Dolan, Alan J. Fletcher, and Juliette Dor (London, 2003).

314. On which concept see especially Anne Hudson, "Lollardy: The English Heresy?" in her *Lollards and Their Books*, pp. 141–63.

315. It is true that the *Convivio* does include a poem on *gentilezza*, that being the subject of the third *canzone* quoted therein, which Dante goes on to expound. But Chaucer's text does not draw attention to the existence of such a poem, and the most obvious way to read the "rym" allusion is as an exclusive reference to the passage from the *Purgatorio* which immediately follows it. Given the overlap of ideas between Dante's poem and its prose exposition, and the fact that the Wife of Bath's moral excursus gives us such a small sample of text to work with, it is impossible (*pace* Lowes) to tell whether Chaucer was working from the poem as well as from its prose exposition. However, Lowes is able to offer some convincing parallels between Dante's *canzone* on *gentilezza* and Chaucer's moral ballad, *Gentillesse*; cf. "Chaucer and Dante's *Convivio*," p. 27.

316. Against this argument must be set Lowes's contention that other passages from the *Convivio* influenced works by Chaucer apart from the *Wife of Bath's Tale*; see "Chaucer and Dante's *Convivio*," pp. 27–33. All these proposed parallels need to be reconsidered in the light of contemporary knowledge about Chaucer's sources.

317. Cf. pp. 33–35 above.

318. Dante's "*Il Convivio*" ("*The Banquet*"), tr. Richard H. Lansing (New York, 1990), p. 190.

319. *Canzone terza*, in *Il Convivio*, ed. Cordati, p. 159.

320. Ed. Stewart, Rand, and Tester, pp. 256–57.

321. There are, of course, other radical claims in the fourth tractate of the *Convivio* that might have been difficult to translate to Chaucer's England, particularly the argument that (when it comes to discussing true nobility) imperial/regal authority has to give way to philosophical authority, with the Philosopher, Aristotle, being "invested with complete power" in this matter (tr. Lansing, p. 165). In other words, what the gentlefolk themselves have to say about gentility is—while their opinions must be heard with respect, to be sure—ultimately of secondary importance. Dante goes on to exclaim, "O pitiful are you who rule at present, and most pitiful you who are ruled! For no philosophical authority is united with your governments, whether by virtue of your own study or through the counsel of others. . . ."

322. As may be inferred despite the lacunae (*Sir Gawain: Eleven Romances*, ed. Hahn, p. 367).

323. *Riverside Chaucer*, pp. 221–22.

324. *Riverside Chaucer*, p. 236.

325. See pp. 296, 455n above.

326. *Riverside Chaucer*, p. 236.

327. Similarly, in Gower's tale the loathly damsel is brought to Florent's castle "prively withoute noise" (I, 1733); whereupon he takes "prive conseil" (I, 1738) of the men he trusts most, and has "prive wommen" (1743) prepare his ugly bride for the wedding—which takes place under cover of darkness, "in the nyht" (I, 1761). In contrast, in the *Wedding of Sir Gawain and Dame Ragnelle* the heroine rejects Queen Guenevere's request that Gawain and she might be married early in the morning, "As pryvaly as ye may" (571). Rather Ragnelle insists on being "weddyd openly," refusing to go to church "tylle Highe Masse tyme." Furthermore, she wants to "dyne" "in the open halle," "In myddys of alle the rowte" (575–80).

328. *Summa confessorum*, ed. Broomfield, p. 375.

329. On these see especially Sharon Farmer, "Persuasive Voices: Clerical Images of Medieval Wives," *Speculum*, 61 (1986), 517–43.

330. W. F. Bryan and G. Dempster (eds.), *Sources and Analogues of Chaucer's "Canterbury Tales"* (New York, 1957), p. 165.

331. According to the *MED*, s.v. *mediacioun* (n.), the meaning of this term can range from active mediation (as carried out by the Virgin Mary, for instance) to something achieved "by means of " or "by virtue of " someone or something, indicating a more passive sense. The vagueness of Chaucer's use of the term is made quite clear by the contrast with what Trevet does here, i.e., identifies Alla's love for Constance as a major motivation; Bryan and Dempster (eds.), *Sources and Analogues*, p. 172.

332. It is generally held that Chaucer decided to include *The Lyf of Seinte Cecile* (originally written as an independent text) in the *Canterbury Tales* relatively late in the development of that composite work, probably in the 1390s. His main sources seem to have been the *Legenda Aurea* and (for the latter part of his narrative) a short version of the *vita* which Sherry L. Reames has dubbed the "Franciscan abridgement"; see her article "A Recent Discovery concerning the Sources of Chaucer's 'Second Nun's Tale,'" *MP* 87 (1990), 337–61. Building on Reames's work, Lynn Staley Johnson has argued that Chaucer, prompted by the abridgment, amplified Cecilia's "combativeness" and "aggressiveness," making her into "as threatening a figure as Wyclif "; "Chaucer's Tale of the Second Nun and the Strategies of Dissent," *SP* 89 (1992), 314–33 (p. 333). While I agree that Chaucer would have "approached a life of Saint Cecilia" with full awareness of "the ways in which her life might offer a means of exploring the political and spiritual realities of his own time" (p. 320), I would dispute both the type and the extent of the "dissent" which Staley Johnson finds therein.

333. Which had its supreme model in the marriage of Mary and Joseph; cf. p. 279 above.

334. Cf. pp. 207, 244 above.

335. This being the result of the brothers' "prechyng" (375) in Maximus's house.

336. A risk which surely Chaucer would have taken, had he wished to make the *Second Nun's Tale* a vehicle for dissent in the manner suggested by Lynn Staley Johnson.

337. In some versions of Cecilia's *vita* this role is clearly allocated to Urban; others occlude or omit the detail, the narrative being curtailed here. Cf. Reames, "A Recent Discovery," p. 344.

338. *Trialogus*, ed. Lechler, p. 280.

339. *Trialogus*, ed. Lechler, pp. 280–81.

340. A thought that Wyclif himself advances elsewhere; cf. p. 20 above.

341. Reames, "A Recent Discovery," p. 344.

342. Cf. Aquinas, *Summa theologiae* 3a, qu. 65, art. 1, especially ad 6um (lvi.138–47; esp. pp. 146–47); also *Summa theologiae*, 3a, qu. 83, art. 3, ad 3 and 4 (lix.148–51).

343. "The Second Nun and the Strategies of Dissent," p. 333; cf. n. 332 above.

344. Cf. once again, *The Book of Margery Kempe*, i.52; ed. Windeatt, p. 253.

345. Cf. also *The Marriage of Sir Gawain*, though at this point the narrative is obscured by lacunae; *Sir Gawain: Eleven Romances*, ed. Hahn, pp. 366–67.

346. *Riverside Chaucer*, p. 220.

347. *Riverside Chaucer*, p. 321.

348. Cf. *Riverside Chaucer*, p. 221.

349. See pp. 191, 193, etc. above.

350. See p. 196 above.

351. See p. 204 above.

352. Riddy, "'Publication' Before Print," p. 40.

353. See pp. 4, 355n., etc. above.

354. See p. 18 above.

355. This comes from the point in Hoccleve's *Dialogue* (22–24) at which his "Friend" asks if he has made his mental breakdown public knowledge. Cf. Hoccleve's "*Complaint*" and "*Dialogue*," ed. Burrow, p. 35; and cf. Riddy, "'Publication' Before Print," p. 41, to which I am indebted here.

356. Here I borrow phrases from Riddy ("'Publication' Before Print," pp. 44–45), who deploys them in a different (but, I believe, fascinatingly related) context, the way in which Julian of Norwich may be understood to have aimed at "publication." This treatment should be compared with Anne Middleton's important identification of the "idea" and the characteristic idioms of "public poetry" in Chaucer's day; "The Idea of Public Poetry in the Reign of Richard II," *Speculum*, 53 (1978), 94–114. Here the concern is not with religious

publicatio but rather with the promotion of a “secular and civic piety” (of a kind which, I would argue, permeates Alisoun’s excursus on true gentility); an “ideal of human nature” is evoked, which “assigns new importance to secular life, the civic virtues, and communal service” (p. 95). Highly sophisticated versions of such discourse may be found in the prologues to learned Middle French translations produced in the late fourteenth and early fifteenth centuries, including many associated with the court of Charles V. There it is constantly emphasized that vital knowledge (comprising both sociopolitical doctrine and scientific lore) is being provided “au prouffit publique,” to quote Guillaume Oresme’s prologue to the translation of Ptolemy’s *Quadripartitum* which he dedicated to the future king. In similar vein, Nicole Oresme introduced his translation of Aristotle’s *Nicomachean Ethics* and *Politics* (undertaken at the king’s request) with the claim that such moral books engender “affection et amour au bien publique.” Here, then, translation—understood as *publicatio*, making public and common, vulgarizing/vernacularizing—is seen as a civic obligation and responsibility, vital for the promotion of those secular virtues which are deemed essential for the wellbeing of the community. The role of the sovereign is seen as crucial; Charles V is commended as the instigator of the *translatio studii* from Rome to Paris (a topos which features frequently in the state-sponsored hermeneutics under discussion here). But in late-medieval England that topos was problematized by hereticated Lollard hermeneutics—and Charles’s learned translators enjoyed a level of patronage of which Chaucer could only have dreamed (cf. the argument in the final part of my introductory chapter). Middle French “publication” of authoritative lore is discussed brilliantly in the conclusion of Caroline Boucher’s doctoral thesis, “La mise en scène de la vulgarisation: Les traductions d’autorités en langue vulgaire aux XIII^e et XIV^e siècles,” *École Pratique des Hautes Études*, 5e section (Paris, 2005), pp. 432–56. In this note I have drawn on her transcript of Guillaume Oresme’s prologue (p. 507); for Nicole Oresme’s prologue see *Le Livre de éthiques d’Aristote*, ed. A. D. Menut (New York, 1940), pp. 97–101 (p. 99).

357. See p. 196 above.

358. *Vita Catharinae Serensis*, I.xi.105; ed. Jungmayr, i.144–45.

359. For a radical hypothesis concerning the way that this work functioned as a school text see Marjorie Curry Woods, “Rape and the Pedagogical Rhetoric of Sexual Violence,” in Rita Copeland (ed.), *Criticism and Dissent in the Middle Ages* (Cambridge, 1996), pp. 56–86.

360. *Pamphilus*, ed. G. Cohen, *La “Comédie” Latine en France au XII^e siècle* (Paris, 1931), ii.219–20, 198. I have drawn on the partial translation of the *Pamphilus* included in *Medieval Comic Tales*, tr. Peter Rickard, Alan Deyermond et al. (Cambridge, 1972), pp. 114–27.

361. This is to read the passage in terms of traditional misogyny, Jean de Meun’s attack on female hypocrisy in sexual matters (as quoted on p. 304 above) being particularly apposite.

362. Wyclif, *English Works*, ed. Matthew, p. 100.

363. Not least because of the well-established belief that “by their very nature, their willful carnality, women are bad readers”—and here “reading” may be understood (following standard medieval usage) as including “reading aloud, lecturing.” Cf. the important discussion by Rita Copeland, “Why Women Can’t Read: Medieval Hermeneutics, Statutory Law, and the Lollard Heresy Trials,” in Susan S. Heinzelman and Z. B. Wiseman (eds.), *Representing Women: Law, Literature, and Feminism* (Durham, N.C., 1994), pp. 253–86; the above quotation is from p. 256.

364. “Gastement de paroles maugracieusses”: here I use a phrase from Christine de Pizan’s condemnation of La Vieille’s “immoral lessons (*disolucions*)”. *Le Débat*, ed. Hicks, p. 130; tr. Baird and Kane, p. 129.

365. *Adversus Jovinianum*, i.47 (PL 23, col. 289B–C).

366. Transcribed from Paris, Bibliothèque Nationale de France, MS fr. 22913, fol. 1v, by Boucher, “La mise en scène de la vulgarisation,” pp. 443, 614–15. On this work see further Jeanette Beer, “Patronage and the Translator: Raoul de Presles’s *La Cité de Dieu* and Calvin’s *Institutio religionis Christianae*,” in Jeanette Beer and K. Lloyd-Jones (eds.), *Translation and the Transmission of Culture Between 1300 and 1600* (Kalamazoo, 1995), pp. 91–141.

367. Raoul’s prologue is extant in only one manuscript, British Library, MS Lansdowne 1175; I quote from the edition included in Samuel Berger, *La Bible française au Moyen Âge* (Paris, 1884), pp. 245–47 (p. 247). As we have it, the translation breaks off at chapter 19 of the Gospel of St. Matthew. It is unclear if Raoul ever finished it (his labors may have been cut short by death) or if the final part has been lost. There is an obvious irony in the fact that

this officially mandated and nurtured enterprise has a far weaker manuscript tradition than that of the hereticated Lollard Bible, on which see especially the revisionary comments of Ralph Hanna, *London Literature, 1300–1380* (Cambridge, 2005), pp. 308–13. However, it should be noted that there was a stronger tradition of Bible translation in late-medieval France than in the England of the same period, in large measure thanks (once again) to patronage by the ruling élite. On the earlier French versions see Berger, *La Bible française*, pp. 221–29, 238–43, and especially the work of Clive R. Sneddon, “The ‘Bible du XIII^e siècle’: Its Medieval Public in the Light of Its Manuscript Tradition,” in W. Lourdaux and D. Verhelst (eds.), *The Bible and Medieval Culture*, ed. W. Lourdaux and D. Verhelst, Mediaevalia Lovaniensia, 1.7 (Louvain, 1979), pp. 127–40; “On the Creation of the Old French Bible,” *Nottingham Medieval Studies*, 46 (2002), 25–44; and “Rewriting the Old French Bible: The New Testament and Evolving Reader Expectations in the Thirteenth and Early Fourteenth Centuries,” in Rodney Sampson and Wendy Ayres-Bennett (eds.), *Interpreting the History of French: A Festschrift for Peter Rickard on the Occasion of His Eightieth Birthday* (Amsterdam, 2002), pp. 35–59.

368. Michel de Certeau, “History: Ethics, Science, and Fiction,” in N. Hahn, T. Bellah, P. Rabinow, and W. Sullivan (eds.), *Social Science as Moral Inquiry* (New York, 1983), pp. 125–52 (p. 128).

369. Michael de Certeau, *The Writing of History*, tr. Tom Conley (New York, 1988), p. 47.

370. De Certeau, *Writing of History*, p. 101.

371. De Certeau, “History: Ethics, Science, and Fiction,” p. 132. The Michelet reference is to the essay “L’héroïsme de l’esprit,” a version of which is printed in his *Oeuvres complètes*, ed. Paul Viallaneix (Paris, 1971–81), iv.31–42.

372. Reinhold Niebuhr, *Faith and History: A Comparison of Christian and Modern Views of History* (New York, 1949), pp. 56, 77.

373. Here and in the previous sentence I borrow some phrases from Jeremy Ahearn, *Michel de Certeau: Interpretation and Its Other* (Stanford, Calif., 1995), pp. 43, 27, 39.

374. On Louis Althusser’s discourse of “contradiction and overdetermination,” see especially his *For Marx*, tr. Ben Brewster (New York, 1963), pp. 87–128. It may be argued that works of art have a relative autonomy and are “overdetermined” inasmuch as they are fixed by a matrix of many factors, any of which (or any combination of which) could produce the resultant effect. Therefore we should be sensitive to the possibility that many possible causes could have produced the effect of Chaucerian dissent.

375. “In Memory of W. B. Yeats,” I, in W. H. Auden: *Collected Shorter Poems, 1927–1957* (London, 1966), p. 141.

376. For discussion of Foxe’s selective presentation of the records of Brut’s trial see my article “Making Bodies: Confection and Conception in Walter Brut’s Vernacular Theology.” Martin Luther “heartily supported” the prohibition of female prophecy or preaching, being quite convinced that the likes of Anna and Mary Magdalene were “extra-ordinary,” with no contemporary counterparts. Here I follow the claims of Susan C. Karant-Nunn and Merry E. Wiesner-Hanks, *Luther on Women: A Sourcebook* (Cambridge, 2003), p. 10.

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Acknowledgments

This book has been a long time in the making, and in the process I have incurred many intellectual debts. Warm thanks for advice, information, and references are due to Peter Biller, Alcuin Blamires, Sarah Blick, John Bowers, J. A. Burrow, Rita Copeland, William J. Courtenay, W. G. East, Vincent Gillespie, Richard Firth Green, Ralph Hanna III, David Hult, Steven Kruger, Ian Christopher Levy, Gary Macy, Stephen Penn, Robert Shaffern, James Simpson, R. N. Swanson, David Wallace, Siegfried Wenzel, and Anders Winroth. I am especially grateful to Dr J. W. Binns for help with many a tricky Latin passage, and to Professors Anne Hudson and Jim Rhodes for reading the entire manuscript in a previous version. The book's completion was greatly facilitated by the research time and support afforded me by the Ohio State University, where I enjoyed the stimulus of a community of brilliant medievalists. Yale University generously provided me with a subvention which helped defray some of the costs of publication.

Over the past few years I have tried out in essay form some of the ideas and the arguments which for the first time are presented as an interrelated whole in the above chapters. Therefore I wish to thank the following presses for permission to reprint and rework certain materials in the articles here listed.

To Boydell and Brewer re: "Theorizing the Rose: Commentary-Tradition in the *Querelle de la Rose*," in P. Boitani and A. Torti (eds.), *Poetics: Theory and Practice in Medieval English Literature* (Woodbridge, 1991), pp. 13–36; "*De impedimento sexus*: Women's Bodies and Medieval Impediments to Female Ordination," in Peter Biller and Alastair Minnis (eds.), *Medieval Theology and the Natural Body*, York Studies in Medieval Theology I (York, 1997), pp. 109–39; "From *coilles* to *bel chose*: Discourses of Obscenity in Jean de Meun and Chaucer," in Nicola McDonald (ed.), *Medieval Obscenities* (York, 2006), pp. 156–78.

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